

# Hegel's Critique of Essence

*A Reading of the Wesenslogik*



Franco Cirulli

# STUDIES IN PHILOSOPHY

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HEGEL'S CRITIQUE OF ESSENCE  
*A Reading of the Wesenslogik*  
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# HEGEL'S CRITIQUE OF ESSENCE

A Reading of the *Wesenslogik*

Franco Cirulli

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*Per Nicola Vozza*



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# List of Abbreviations

## **FICHTE**

*EW* = *Early Writings*, trans. D. Breazeale. Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1988.

*GA* = *Gesamtausgabe der Bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften*, ed. R. Lauth and H. Jacob. Stuttgart: fromman-holzboog, 1965.

*IW* = *Introductions to the Wissenschaftslehre, and Other Writings*, trans. D. Breazeale, Indianapolis, Hackett, 1994.

*SK* = *The Science of Knowledge*. With the First and Second Introductions, trans. P. Heath and J. Lachs. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982.

*WL* = *Grundlage der gesamten Wissenschaftslehre*. Als Handschrift für seine Zuhörer. Einleitung und Register von Wilhelm G. Jacobs. Hamburg, Felix Meiner, 1988.

## **HEGEL**

*DS* = *The Difference between Fichte and Schelling's System of Philosophy*, trans. H. Harris and W. Cerf. Albany, NY.: SUNY Press, 1977.

*E* = *Encyclopedia Logic. Part one of the Encyclopedia of Philosophical Sciences with the Zusätze*, trans. Geraets, Suchting, Harris. Indianapolis, Hackett 1991.

*F&K* = *Faith and Knowledge*, trans. W. Cerf and H.S. Harns. Albany, N.Y.: SUNY Press, 1977.

*PhG* = *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A. Miller. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971.

*PHN* = *Philosophy of Nature*, trans. M. Petry. N.J., Humanities Press, 1970.

*L II* = *Wissenschaft der Logik. Erster Teil. Die Objektive Logik. Zweites Buch. Die Lehre vom Wesen* (1813), Hrsg. Hans-Jürgen Gawoll, Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 1992.

*L III* = *Wissenschaft der Logik Zweiter Teil. Die Subjektive Logik. Die Lehre vom Begriff*. Hrsg. Hans-Jürgen Gawoll, Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 1994.

*LHP* = *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*. 3 voll. Trans. F. S. Haldane and F. H. Simson. London, Kegan, 1894.

*LPR* = *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion. One Volume Edition: the Lectures of 1827*, trans. R.F. Brown, P.C. Hodgson, J.M. Stewart. Berkeley, University of California Press, 1988.

*SL* = *Science of Logic*, trans. A. Miller. Atlantic Highlands, Humanities Press, 1989.

*VL* = *Vorlesungen über die Logik Berlin 1831*. Hrsg. U. Rameil and H.C. Lucas. Hamburg, Meiner, 2001.

*VLM* = *Vorlesungen über Logik und Metaphysik 1817*. Hrsg. K. Gloy. Hamburg, Meiner, 1992.

*W* = *Werke*, ed. E. Moldenhauer and K. Michel, 20 vols. Frankfurt, Suhrkamp, 1970–1 (Theorie Werkausgabe).

## **HÖLDERLIN**

*H* = *Friederich Hölderlin. Essays and Letters on Theory*. Trans. and ed. by Thomas Pfau. Albany, SUNY Press, 1988.

## **KANT**

*CPR* = *The Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Norman Kemp Smith, New York, St. Martin's Press, 1965.

*CPPr* = *The Critique of Practical Reason*, trans. Lewis White Beck, third edition. New Jersey, Prentice Hall, 1993.

***K. REINHOLD & G.E. SCHULZE:***

*BKF* = *Between Kant and Fichte. Texts in the development of PostKantian Idealism.* Trans. H. Harris and G. Di Giovanni. Albany, SUNY Press, 1985.

***SCHELLING***

*AW* = *Ages of the World (fragment 1815).* Trans. Jason M. Wirth. Albany, Suny Press, 2005.

*B* = *Bruno. On the Natural and the Divine Principle of Things.* Trans. Michael G. Vater. Albany, SUNY Press, 1984.

*FSNP* = *First Outline of a System of the Philosophy of Nature.* Trans. Keith Peterson. Albany, Suny Press, 2004.

*SW* = *Sämmtliche Werke*, hrsg. K.F.A. Schelling, I. Abtheilung Bde. 1-10. hrsg. Stuttgart, Cotta 1856–1861.



# Preface

Very little has been written in English on Hegel's *Logic of Essence*. I hope that my book (a reworking of my doctoral dissertation "Hegel's Logic of Essence") can increase interest in this daunting, but also very fascinating region of Hegel's thought.

I blame Kenley Dove and Stanley Rosen for sparking and nurturing my interest in Hegel. Their wonderful lecture series on the *Logic* have motivated me to dig deeper into the recesses of Hegel's categorial theory. I want to thank Klaus Brinkmann for a year long directed study on the Logic of Essence and for his friendly advice. I am also grateful to Daniel Dahlstrom for reading the final draft and offering me some very penetrating remarks.

Without Alfredo Ferrarin, this work would have never seen the light of day. His constant encouragement and assistance, his friendly irony have sustained me through many impasses. He has been an unforgettable tour guide through the problems and history of metaphysics. This book is a way of saying 'thank you, *Magistre, qui res aeternas mihi docuit.*'

I want to thank my wife Julie for her invaluable assistance during the editing process, and of course, for coming into my life.

Two people who would have loved to see this book can no longer do so. Grandma and Grandpa, this book is also for you. Last but not least, I want to thank my uncle Nicola Maroscia: throughout the writing process he has been like a father to me, showing me unconditional trust in my possibilities.



## Chapter One

# *Sein and Reflexion: The Historical Antecedents of the Logic*

But we have only concepts of that which at one time has gone bad and has been made good again; of childhood and innocence we have no concepts

(Hölderlin, *Hyperion*).

### 1. THE IDEA OF A LOGIC OF ESSENCE

The logic of *Essence* is such a thicket of dense (and sometimes almost impenetrable) redescrptions of classical categories, that the reader, lost at the level of microanalysis, may forget to ask a very basic question: why is this central section called a doctrine of *essence*? If an essence is supposed to be an eminently intelligible structure which makes an entity the determinate thing that it is, it seems that also any category of the doctrine of Being should be entitled to be construed as an essence—after all, any category in the *Logic* does not concern “things, but their *import*, their concept” (SL 39).

An answer can be had by focusing on the particular object whose essence the *Logic* must spell out, and this object is nothing else but thought per se: a situation in which “nothing is either below or above us, and in such solitude we are only with ourselves” (E §31). The *Logic* seeks to answer this question: what categories are required if thought is to think itself, in the sense of grasping its own essence qua pure activity? This is not to be understood pictorially: a category is not a mere representation of a noetic *Beisichsein* (E §31), of the presence of pure thought to itself. A category which just *reflects* the being of thought would separate logic from metaphysics and fall short of the program of a “science of logic which constitutes metaphysics



proper" (SL 27). To take literally the unity of the two can mean only one thing: a category is the presence of thought to itself. If qua pure thinker, I think of myself as—say—'something,' it also means that 'something' is thinking itself. But this is not a supine, unquestioning assumption: on the contrary, the need for justification is constant, since until the final shape of the 'Absolute Idea,' each categorial shape reveals its incomplete status through its explicit failure to grasp completely that which it was intended to seize upon.

This does not mean that a category has failed to capture a plenitude of self-presence that was ripe from the outset, and that a new, more accurate category is required. No, the very postulate of the identity of thought and being, entails that an incomplete category is a defective presence of thinking to itself.<sup>1</sup> Any resolution of the problem in categorial terms is not a more telling unveiling of a fact, but the simultaneous construction of a more complete self-presence—hence the emancipatory character of philosophy. In the case of the *Logic*, the emancipatory task is twofold. First, thought should be in full possession of itself, in the sense of being fully self-transparent; categories used in ignorance of their origin in spontaneity makes us forget that they "are means for us" (SL 35), and makes us believe "that we serve them, that in fact they have us as our possession [ . . . ] how shall I set myself up as *more* universal than they, which are the universal as such?" (*ibid*). Hegel's *nosce te ipsum* invitation is at once a summons to be freed from self-slavery: "the loftier business of logic therefore is to clarify these categories and in them to raise mind to freedom and truth" (*ibid*). Second, if the essence of thought is freedom, this self-perspicuousness should not be a given, but rather a deed. The determinations of thought should be self-determinations, in the sense of their making thematic the dynamic character of thought: this is the gist of Hegel's conviction that "these dead bones of logic can be quickened by spirit" (SL 53).

Therefore, categories in Hegel cannot be static eidetic structures: they are instead eidetic structures of the *active comportment* of self-relating thought—in a way, they are descriptions of a *doing*. Following the Hegelian metaphor that one can get at the logos of swimming only by actually swimming, the *Logic* is (if I may say so) a pool in which the full meaning of any category is tested only by seeing if the latter can indeed swim the laps it purports to be able to handle. That is, the point is to see if its initial definition manages to exhaustively cover the structure of its actual 'doing.' An example: we will see that the category of "Absolute Identity" fails to cover its actual 'doing' precisely because the category turns out to be *more* than just 'identity': it is a self-contradictory stipulation of identity and difference. In light

of this, the meaning of a category is not a static *logos*, but something that needs to be adjusted and enriched any time that the 'saying' of that category is at loggerheads with its 'doing.'

If we combine the two desiderata of theory and practical spontaneity, we can conjecture that the *Logic* is the narrative of thought spontaneously raising itself to the freedom of self-transparency: metaphysics and the *Bildungsroman* coalesce into one. Thus, we should be able to detect in the categorical sequence a cumulative process of growth: each category should, while retaining the strengths of its predecessors, thematize more fully self-possession and the active character of such self-presence. This is a strongly Fichtean component: we are who we make ourselves to be; to suppose a static nature is to relapse into the dogmatism that equates reason with a bone unveiled by the work of the anatomist. Hegel, like Fichte, sees praxis operating at the very heart of theory: to understand oneself is to be engaged in the systematic, non-arbitrary construction of one's identity *qua* pure thinker.<sup>2</sup>

Thus, if we have to flesh out the essence of a pure, self-reflexive thought, it stands to reason that this essence, whatever it may turn out to be, must minimally thematize the subject-object bidimensionality of this *noesis noeseos*, and the self-producing nature of this pattern. In light of this, the Doctrine of Being does not articulate essences, since it fails to consider exhaustively the bi-dimensional noetic 'import' of the object, as can be deduced from the monodimensional constitution of its categories: the *Seinslogik* lays upon itself the constraint that pure thinking can only take place through one category. This is not from a willful Ockhamian thriftiness, but from the desire to understand oneself as a unity. One may read, in the underlying spirit of the *Seinslogik*, Hegel's immanent critique of Romanticism's deep mistrust of the bifurcations of the *raison raisonnante*, and its concurrent nostalgia for an archetypal state of integrity. Hegel himself feels the force of this critique of Enlightenment rationality, but he also sees it doomed to failure precisely because of its uncompromising monism. The Doctrine of Being is the systematic attempt to rethink the Romantic desire for unity, by eliminating its self-defeating, crude categorical conception via an immanent critique. To think of A is also to demarcate it from  $\neg A$ . However, since Being-categories refuse the concept of relationality and internal difference, they are not able to capture the diremption attending any determinate thought. Less abstrusely: since the  $A/\neg A$  *diarexis* is an act of thinking that makes possible the thought of A, it too should achieve categorical status. That is, not only the form of self-presence, but also the determinate aspect of self-determination should be thematized.

Thus, if we ask the perfectly sensible question: 'What is the benefit of proceeding as Hegel does, i.e. instead of assuming a fixed essence to be logically analyzed, why does he insist on a 'dynamic,' self-determining essence?', a very elementary answer would run as follows. If thought had a fixed essence which can become the object of a thinking self-apprehension, it would turn out that essence and self-apprehension would be external to each other, and thus that the alleged essence fails to capture an absolutely crucial dimension of pure thought, its constitutive *Beisichsein*. Thus, whatever it may turn out to be, the essence of pure thinking should minimally be a category including the subject/object structure of self-consciousness, and the absolute, non-formal unity of the two poles. Yet this is not enough: this absolute identity cannot be taken to be a fact, but must be cast in relief as the product of spontaneity: the determinate being of thought exists in and through the self-determination of thought itself. It is in this sense that the essence should be 'dynamicized': it should thematize also the positively self-constituted character of thought.<sup>3</sup>

This means that a monodimensional category *eo ipso* cannot capture thinking in its entirety, and therefore that it is unsuited for the purposes of freedom (understood as unitary, exhaustive self-presence). Since a monodimensional category is not 'strong enough' to sustain the unavoidable relationality that is at its basis, pure monism condemns itself to an endless wavering between two categorial opposites: thought thematizes itself now as *A*, now as  $\sim A$ , because the unavoidable dialectic that leads one pole to its other cannot accomodate their synthesis, and can only result in the suppression of the former in favor of the latter. Only the categorial thematization of relationality can save pure thought from the ceaseless oscillations between two poles. It also follows that the *Seinslogik* not only fails to categorize the subject/object relationality, but also the spontaneous root of that relation: the movements from one pole to the other are taken to be the arbitrary movement of opinion.<sup>4</sup>

And it is precisely the categorial thematization of relationality and of its spontaneous root that characterizes the concepts of the Doctrine of Essence. The *Wesenslogik* aims to accomodate the desideratum of unity with the inescapable *Urtheilung* (division) attending determinate thought. Here, oppositionality is thematized through bi-dimensional categories: that is, each category is explicitly described as a unit standing in a relation to its other—whereas Being-categories suffered no relationality. Unity, on the other hand, is accounted for by describing difference as a mere illusion, a *Schein*. That is, each category is thematically related to an other, but this other appears to be lacking an ontological self-standing status, and appears only as a posit of the

first category itself. Spontaneity is thematized through the vocabulary of a 'positor' and a 'posited.' Yet, the *Wesenslogik* does not quite achieve a genuine synthesis of all the moments involved. Let us see how.

The necessary relation to a completely dependent other is the paradoxical pattern of *Reflexion*, an acknowledgement of necessary relationality, but as an inessential side of the category under consideration: an essential positor is related to an inessential posited. But on the other hand, even the determinacy of the first (allegedly primary) category is parasitic upon the contrast with the (putatively secondary) posited category: even the determinate nature of the first category turns out to be a posit, and thus a *Schein*. There is thus a reciprocal determination between categories (a clear echo of Fichte's *Wechselbestimmung*), a mutual dynamic that in the *Seinslogik* appeared only as opinion's ceaseless transition between static poles. More in general, then, *all* determinacy within the Doctrine of Essence is posited.

This means that *all* determinate presence of thinking to itself is constructed, and thus its ostensibly immediate nature is only a *Schein*, an illusion. The only locus of genuine unity appears to be the positing activity itself which carves out two mutually opposed categorial fields: i.e. only the activity of reflection is unitary. However, the resolution of self-standing determinacy (*Sein*) into the activity of positing (*Reflexion*) is not complete. Indeed, the separating and interrelating activity of reflection cannot account for the difference between the two opposed determinacies. That is, there is no indication as to how two opposed contents (say, 'cause' and 'effect') find in reflection an all-inclusive content that is their genuine synthesis. Reflection cannot provide more than a mechanical unity of different categorial determinacies: there is, in the Doctrine of Essence, an imperfect unity of *Sein* and *Reflexion*. Hegel is giving us the pure logical form of a Fichtean scheme: the divisive and synthetic operations (reflection) of the transcendental imagination cannot be genuinely unified—they do not achieve Being (cf. Rosen 1974, 102–103).

Only if we can show that there is an intimate link between the content of a determinacy and the movement of positing another determinacy will we overcome the indifference (*Gleichgültigkeit*, L II 5) of reflection vis-à-vis being. This means that we want a dynamic in which the posited content is not only the negation, but also the self-constituting fulfillment of the first—we want a dialectic of development, not of mere positionality. The shift from the latter to the former is clear only to the extent that we can intelligibly reinterpret position of the other as a self-position, without deconstructing the other as a mere illusion.

Given this desideratum, the Doctrine of the Concept is called upon to capture explicitly and exhaustively in *one* category this bifurcation of categories

and activity. Less abstrusely, we should begin with one category thematizing the self-directed activity of a content, which spontaneously establishes difference within itself; and which yet in so doing determines itself to a more perfect unity. Very crudely, this consists in inverting the sequence of the Fichtean triad, and beginning instead with the third principle, moving to the second as subject-object difference, and ending with Absolute unity as *a result*. Hegel illustrates this scheme with a botanical metaphor

The germ of a plant, for instance, already contains the particular: root, branches, leaves, etc., but the particular is here present only in-itself, and is posited only when the germ opens up; this opening-up should be regarded as the *ur-theilen* of the plant (E §166, Z.)

Although the seed reneges its unity through the articulation in roots, stem and leaves, by doing so it fulfills (rather than loses) its true nature. Analogically, the unity of the plant cutting across its different parts is the same unity as the copula 'is' bridging the difference of subject and predicate—hence the opening-up of the plant as *ur-theilen*, judging. In a judgment, a category (the subject) differentiates itself (via a predicate), and yet remains unitary in its relation to otherness, as intimated by the copulative 'is.' The 'opening-up' trope suggests that unity is not abandoned, but merely developed; whereas in *Essence* the governing trope of 'return' intimates *a resulting* (as opposed to a self-developing) unity, one that becomes explicit only after two opposite categories have made explicit their codependence—i.e. after it has become explicit that positing the other is part and parcel of positing oneself. From the standpoint of the concept, where unity always already permeates relations between categories, we can cast a retrospective glance at the Doctrine of Essence:

The preceding determinations of reflection [i.e. the positor, the posited, and their ground] have among their relationship *also* the relation to each other, but their connection is only one of "having," not of "being" [e.g. a cause *has* an effect, but it *is not* the effect: cause and effect *have* a ground, but they *are not* their ground—a *causa sui* pattern is still missing here; it is not identity posited as such [i.e. categorially thematized], or universality (E §166, Z).

This being the case, one crucial task of *Essence* must be to change its own notion of a determination (the feature of any category whose explicit relation to otherness was only *implicitly* a full self-relation) into that of a 'particular'—that of a limited structure in which, nevertheless, the whole establishes itself as a whole:

The particular, therefore, not only *contains* the universal but through its determinateness also exhibits it [*darstellt*]. Consequently, the universal constitutes a sphere that the particular must exhaust. This totality appears, insofar as the determinateness of the particular is taken as mere diversity [i.e. as a difference from the universal that does not prejudge the integrity of the relata] (L III, 38).

This claim is momentous, because it declares the paradox of the analysis of the whole to be solved. As mentioned, it is ostensibly impossible to understand the whole of thinking through a constituent part (because it leaves out the other parts) nor is it possible to understand it through the sum of the parts themselves (since the relationality between the parts is left unaccounted; cf. Rosen 1974, 43). But Hegel implies that these difficulties rest upon the intrinsically deficient notions of ‘whole’ and ‘part.’ In the idea of particularity, we supersede the deficient notion of a ‘part’: the latter inescapably involves a mathematical/quantitative understanding of the whole (SL 617–618), where the parts emerge from the subsequent operation of analysis. Conversely, particularity is an original, non-derived mode of being of the whole: this is what Hegel implies when he claims that particularity *presents* (*darstellt*) the whole, instead of re-presenting it. By jettisoning the quantitative dimension of ‘part,’ we embrace—at least in principle—the idea of a structure that can present a whole *in toto*.

This entails that even the notion of a whole must be subjected to a revision. Platonic dialectic rests on the assumption that the whole is prior and indifferent to the operation of division and collection, so that the formal articulation in subordinate eidetic components is an external procedure that leaves untouched the being of the analyzed content. Hegel tries to defeat this assumption through the progression articulated by the *Wesenslogik*: he tells us that at the close of *Essence* “the antithesis between form and content has been left behind” (E §160), and that at that stage essence “gives itself its determinate being that is equal to its being in itself and becomes Concept” (SL 391)—that is, the categorial rendition (determinate being) finally thematizes adequately all the moments of the nature (being-in-itself) of thought thinking itself. Implicitly, this amounts to the exciting (or infuriating, depending on one’s philosophical sensibility) claim that a content divides itself *motu proprio* into an articulated structure, and realizes itself in the division.

To be sure, Hegel is perfectly aware that although the end result of the Doctrine of Essence is to replace the triad Identity-Difference-Ground with Universality, Particularity and Singularity (E §164), the task of comprehension lies—to a significant extent—ahead, and not behind. Above all, what

remains to be categorially thematized is *how* each member of the U-P-S triad *makes* itself identical with the other. Even granting that the Concept is a judgment in which each of the three poles of subject, object and copula actively establishes its identity with the other two, the fact remains that an *Urteil* foregoes the description of this process, and merely presents us with the fact of their identity (SL 625). Even at this level, there is a slippage between a concept and an extraconceptual residue.

I will not pursue the details of this deduction (which in its entirety constitutes the Doctrine of the Concept), since that will amount almost to a full scale commentary on the *Logic*. Rather, I will focus on the Doctrine of Essence, since it is crucial in understanding if a *Begriffslogik* is plausible at all, and to see whether the critique of Enlightenment rationality lands us into the suppression of rationality as such. And even more fundamental to see if the part/whole paradox can be dealt with in a way that makes essence-talk still meaningful.

Before launching into a detailed analysis of the *Wesenslogik*, it may be wise to consider the historical roots of its two main operating concepts of *Sein* and *Reflexion*. In doing so, we will dwell not only on Kant and Fichte, but also on that *enfant terrible* of the German Enlightenment, Friedrich Jacobi. As I will try to show, the last two figures especially are of crucial importance in understanding the presuppositions of the Doctrine of Essence.

## 2. THE SEARCH FOR UNITY: KANTIAN ANTECEDENTS

While the relationship between the particular and the universal is a problem as old as philosophy itself, one could argue that the period spanning the last two decades of the 18<sup>th</sup> and the first third of the 19<sup>th</sup> century was extraordinarily engrossed, when not obsessed, with it. Be it the poetic imagination of *Frühromantiker* like Jacobi, Novalis, Hölderlin, F. Schlegel, or the more systematic efforts of Fichte, Schelling and Hegel: what gives to this period its unique perspective on the problem, is the fact that the tension between particular and universal is redescribed as one spanning between finite and infinite. The fact that human nature is by definition finite betrays the fact that now the relationship between particular and universal is also seen as an existential laceration, a conflict of the individual against society, when not against himself. For this period, the investigation of the unity of the two dimensions is definitely not the fashionable one-many sport for bright youngsters that Socrates ironizes about in the *Philebus* (15d5–16a5). Instead, the young Hegel is the mouthpiece of a whole generation in his famous remark that

When the power of unification disappears from the life of men, when opposites lose their living relation to, and reciprocal influence upon one another and become self-contained, the need for philosophy arises (DS 91).

The call of duty experienced as antagonistic to the individual, the world facing consciousness as an indifferent other: these pairs emerge as dualisms, because they have lost in the modern world the connection they used to have in Classical Antiquity (at least through the lenses of this age's nostalgic cult of the Greeks), and face each other as ossified extremes. The *Friühromantiker*, Fichte, Schelling and Hegel distilled the philosophical treatment of this existential problem into two ideas, that of Being (*Sein*) and Reflection (*Reflexion*). At the most general level, Reflection stands for dualisms and dividedness *überhaupt*, while Being embodies a primordial, self-evident unity.<sup>5</sup> And still very crudely, one could say that if the dividedness of Reflection is the malaise, then a reunification through Being would appear to be the remedy. But is it possible for a human being to reach this One, in order to heal his internal divisions? Was such talk even conceivable, after Kant?

Kant had made clear that the only overarching unity we could ever experience was the one we constructed piecemeal in the connection of bits of experiential intake, but this synthesis was bound to be perennially incomplete, due to the inescapably temporal character of our experience. Indeed, there could be no unconditioned *in time*, since the mere fact of being-temporal requires a ground to be further grounded in an antecedent. Thus, the concept of an unconditioned allowing us to finally experience complete unity is a mere organizational grid lacking ontological import, an *idea*:

The absolute whole of all appearances—we might thus say—is *only an idea*: since we can never represent it in an image, it remains *a problem* to which there is no solution (CPR A 328, *original emphasis*).

In PostKantian currency, this is tantamount to saying that when we transcend Reflection (when we try to side-step our constitutive division from a first principle) the only unity we achieve is the spurious one of a theoretically empty representation, which still has over against it the chronically open-ended character of experience.

On the other hand, Kant was to later make room for a seminal exception: the second *Critique* ushered in the *real*, non-ideal immanence of a first principle (the moral law) within human consciousness:



The consciousness of this fundamental law may be called a fact of reason, since one cannot ferret it out from antecedent data of reason, such as the consciousness of freedom . . . it forces itself upon us as a synthetic *a priori* proposition based on no pure or empirical intuition

(CPrR, 31).

Exceptionally, it would seem that the self is finally present to itself as one, without the mind/world divisiveness of theoretical Reflection: not only the moral law rests solely upon itself, without any need for a justification which would tarnish its ontological primacy, but the awareness of this moral unconditioned in me is the awareness of my own true nature.<sup>6</sup> I may be divided against myself in my attitude toward positive religion, but I am one with myself when I hark to the inner voice of the moral law.<sup>7</sup> Although Kant went out of his way to confine the import of this principle to moral agency alone, depriving it of any positive theoretical implication (CPrR 6), his 'fact of reason' was to prove terribly influential, albeit in very different ways. The early Fichte, for instance, ignored the Kantian caveat that the awareness of duty could not count as an intellectual intuition of oneself, and took that awareness to be the manifestation of an original unity: human practical spontaneity. Given the centrality of that primordial self-intuition, Fichte's 1794 *Science of Knowledge* set out to construe the problematic limitation exerted upon us by the external world as an unconscious (but spontaneous) act of self-limitation, necessary for the creation of obstacles against which our volition could direct itself. It's as if Fichte wanted to explain the starry heavens above in terms of the moral law within!

On the other hand, figures like Hölderlin and Novalis took seriously the theoretical emptiness of the Kantian *Faktum*, and were skeptical toward any *Grundsatzphilosophie* (a philosophy claiming a foothold in a knowable first principle), even in the gripping version of their charismatic teacher Fichte.<sup>8</sup> For them, the unity of self-consciousness could not be its own Archimedean point, and could be explained only in terms of a transcendent unity, a *Sein*. This unity itself could not be known, since to know it is to dissolve it: discursive knowledge is *Reflexion* whose subject-object connection presupposes the primordial *Sein*-unity, but cannot explain it. Thus, *Sein* could only be the object of an intellectual intuition (Hölderlin and the first Schelling) or the object of an infinite approximation (Novalis). And even the Frankfurt Hegel (who was very much under the influence of Hölderlin) believed that the diremptions between positive religion and man and between duty and nature could be reunified only in the *feeling* of a transreflexive Being, but not in the reflexivity of knowledge (Düsing 1976, 58–59). Finite being, construed at the outset as separate from the whole, could only

achieve reunification in an open-ended synthesis, but could never reach the unalloyed unity of the transcendent *Sein* (ibid, 57)—and in this the young Hegel shares Novalis' Kantian strain.

It bears repeating that this division between *Sein* as transcendent unity and our reflective (*qua* oppositional) consciousness stemmed from the idea that the two terms were simply irreconcilable. Thus, Fichte could remark that the idea of a self-conscious divinity was unintelligible, since unitary Being would make impossible the subject/object division presupposed by "God as *reflected upon* . . . and God as *reflecting*" (SK 242). Conversely, it was also our constitutionally reflective finitude that risked obliteration, were it to actualize its relation to the One, so that Kant's negative ontology betrays more a self-preserving fear, than a genuine respect for the divine—a point perceptively driven home by Schelling

It is self-evident that the positing of the Ego outside the Absolute, when it is agreed to, and made into a *principle*, reciprocally entails by a very simple necessity the relegation of the Absolute outside of the Ego [ . . . I according to the whole intention of this *idealism*, the Ego should remain in its empirical integrity; for the in-itself is removed simply because for the sake of the Ego which ought to subsist *per se*, it too must be thought *outside* it

(*On the Relationship of The Philosophy of Nature  
to Philosophy in General*, 369–370).<sup>9</sup>

But, once more, how could it be possible that the immediate postKantian generation fell under the gravitational pull of the idea of a monistic Being—even if in Kantian fashion they despaired of its knowability? If the absolute *Sein*, as the (achievable or problematic) object of a monistic metaphysics cannot emerge just from a critical engagement with Kant, Romanticism's working out of that issue can only be understood through its exposure to Spinoza. It is here that the influential figure of Jacobi comes on its own. Many of these thinkers did not read their Spinoza directly, but were exposed to his thought only through Jacobi's seminal *Spinoza-Büchlein*.<sup>10</sup> Questions of exegetical faithfulness aside (and they are legion), Jacobi's little tract exerted a tremendous intellectual impact with its exploitation of one Spinozistic strand: namely, the idea of a primordial, unitary Being (*Sein*) ontologically prior to any phenomenon of difference. Jacobi pressed forcefully this notion on his audience, underscoring that *Sein* had to elude the mediations of reason (the *Ethics* being their most coherent, thoroughgoing instance) by virtue of its very immediacy, and offered itself in its undividedness only to feeling.<sup>11</sup>

The young Hegel's concern with an *Ur-Sein* (and that of his friends Hölderlin and Schelling), must in all likelihood be traced back to an active reception of Jacobi's message—all the more so, since his *Spinozabüchlein* was required reading for the Tübingen *Stiftlers* (Düsing 1976, 53). But is it as plausible to say that Jacobi's monistic *Sein* retains a paramount importance even for Hegel's *Logic*, whose conflation of logic and ontology injects the mediations of Reflection within the unity of Being? I will suggest that it does, provided we understand Hegel's endorsement of the Jacobian position to be "very conditioned" (Hörstmann 1995, 165).

### 3. HEGEL AND JACOBI: THE USES AND ABUSES OF IMMEDIACY

*Dos moi pou sto*—Give me a place to stand.

(*Archimedes*—opening motto of Jacobi's *Spinozabüchlein*)

Although Hegel's most sustained (and scathing) engagement with Jacobi takes place in the early *Faith and Knowledge*, it is in the later *Third Position of Thought* (E §§ 61–78) that Hegel's debts to Jacobi emerge. Although Hegel criticizes thoroughly the shortcomings of Jacobi's intuitionism, he understands that this extreme solution was an answer to a genuine problem. In a nutshell, Hegel believes that there is a significant truth at the core of the intuitionist doctrine: the criteria of objectivity of classical rationalism are deficient since they involve a

Thinking progression through *sequences*, from one *conditioned* item to another *conditioned* one, where each condition is itself just something-conditioned once more. In other words, cognition is a progression through *conditioned conditions*. To explain and to comprehend, therefore, means to show that something is *mediated* through something *else*. Hence, every content is only a *particular*, *dependent*, and *finite* one (E s.62. R).

The point here is not only that this conceptual scheme forbids itself the knowledge of totality, reaching at best only an open-ended knowledge of the parts.<sup>12</sup> More radically, not even the knowledge of a single part can be explained by the endless justificatory procedures of classical rationalism. And yet, Jacobi observed, we could not even move one step in ordinary experience without the immediate certainty of a whole host of particularities. Where does this certainty come from? Reflection must leave us in the lurch when it comes to explaining the most elementary sense of certainty, such as

that of having a chill. Since *I immediately* know that I have a chill, it is obvious that reflection alone cannot account for the phenomenon, proceeding as it does through an infinite ground/grounded mediation. Thus, Jacobi concludes, the evidence of the feeling of the chill must hinge on the concurrent awareness of a primordial *Sein* appearing in it. And more in general, all discursive knowledge rests upon this awareness of an *Ur-Sein*, an awareness that is a fideistic *Salto Mortale* eschewing the mediations of reflection.

And it is this observation that beckons to Hegel's need for a reunification of the oppositions of ordinary life: Jacobi's point that absolute unity does not need to be pursued through infinite, consecutive syntheses (an impossible task anyway), since it is always already present in the finite. There is more than a Jacobian overtone in the Hegelian suggestion that our attempt to employ discursive Reflection as a snare to capture absolute unity implicitly takes its bearings from a unity already manifesting itself in the diremptions of our finitude (*"für sich schon bei uns,"* W 3, 69; cf. also DS 93). Thus, Jacobi's radical mysticism contains a decisive critique of the Enlightenment model of rationality: the latter's categories—precisely because their mechanistic root completely negates the independence of the *explanandum*—are not only incapable of capturing the integrity of our experience of the finite, but they also imply that our experience of the divine should itself obey the normative constraints of the ground/grounded principle. Thus, the scientist Lalande could claim that "he had searched through the heavens, but he had not found God" (E § 62): there is something terribly demeaning in envisioning God as the infinitely removed link of a causal chain, as if He did not have the power to immediately reveal Himself in my consciousness as the object of my knowledge. Kant himself followed suit when he denied *knowledge* of the divine by reducing knowledge to open-ended enchainment of experiential finitudes.

Nevertheless, Hegel endorses the Jacobian point that such metaphysical parsimoniousness cannot save the phenomenon of unity present in our consciousness, from the most trivial sensation to the most elevated religious experience. However, while Hegel endorses Jacobi's critique of determinism, he is quick to add that only *one* idol of rationality comes under fire, and not thinking as such (Hörstmann 1995, 185). It is important that fideism has brought to light the finitude of Kantian categories (E § 62); that is, such categories are unable to do justice to self-grounding entities (organic systems, the spiritual dimension in man—cf. L II 227–228), nor can they illuminate the immediate, self-revealing presence of the divine in man, a task "that mattered so much to the noble Jacobi" (E *2nd intr.*, 28). But, again, this amounts to a critique of the deficiencies of classical rationalism, not to a radical rejection of rationality *per se*.

In the *Third Position of Thought*, Hegel makes this point negatively, through an assessment of the intrinsic difficulties of an intuitionistic philosophy taking its bearings solely from a monistic *Sein*. Such position bases itself exclusively on the unity of subjective certainty, while refusing to consider difference, in the shape of the *determinate* nature of the content, as capable of a truth-value (E §71); unfortunately, such refusal inescapably entails that the most extravagant facts of consciousness may in principle be objective provided they are accompanied by a belief in their truth (E §74). Conversely, Hegel argues that *immediate* presence to consciousness (although absolutely crucial, E §70) is not enough—what is required is a presence exhibiting its truth via a *mediating* structure (E §66), i.e. via reflection.

Jacobi's rigid monism is deficient also in the character of its ontotheology, since in its inarticulateness it refuses to shed light on the nature of the divine, falling short of the ultimate aims of religion: "The object of religion, like that of philosophy, is the eternal truth, God and nothing but God and the *explication* of God" (LPR 78 italics mine). This empty fideism, Hegel goes on ironically, brings us back two thousand years, to the Athenians who erected an altar to the unknown deity (E § 73). To deny God life, spirit—and thus the determinacy of self-mediation—is to really impoverish his nature; thus, God and our cognition of him must necessarily contain mediation (E § 74).<sup>13</sup>

Let us lay aside for the moment the issue of whether Hegel's conception of philosophy as discursive *Gottensdienst* (religious service) is hubristic question-begging. It is instead crucial to flesh out the epistemological problem implicit in these considerations: what is the nature of knowledge?

Minimally, if I am to know X, two desiderata must be satisfied: the first is that I go beyond X's sheer particularity, and recognize the universal dimension in X constituting its essence. Second, I must in some way account for the unity between X and its essence: I must furnish the ground of unity between universal and particular. This requirement is important, if knowledge is not to tear asunder that which it seeks to grasp. Hegel's point is that neither fideism nor Enlightenment (or classical) rationalism is capable of fulfilling these criteria. While classical rationalism rightly insists on universality, it fails to satisfy the second criterion: it cannot account for the unity between particular and universal. Indeed, it claims that the essence of particular X is to be an *effect* of—say—*cause* Y, but Y qua universal cannot account for its unity with X, since its normative force rests upon the prior, additional element Z, and so on, in an infinite regress which never yields the ground of the X-Y unity.

Jacobi is right when he points out how this conceptual scheme obfuscates (instead of illuminating) the identification of objects in everyday experience: we

*could not* recognize anything at all if we stood at the mercy of an infinitely removed ground to connect an essence to an object. Jacobi thus insists on the actual presence of the ground *in* the object of thought: the divine *Sein* immediately revealing itself in any object is the Archimedean point (the *dos mou pou sto*) that prevents cognition from splintering the object into an endless cause/effect chain. Unfortunately, the cost he wants us to pay for this is too high: Jacobi wants to do away altogether with universality, with a categorization of the object, that is. All that remains is the non-discursive, divine ground *in* the object. But with this monism, philosophy ceases to answer the question of the ‘*what*’ of the object, and turns into mute gesturing toward a ‘*that*’ (E § 73). Such intuitionism explains the unity of thought at the cost of thought’s determinacy: if to think is always to think *something*, then the question of the ‘*what*,’ of the universal cannot be ignored. Consistently enough, Jacobi ends up simply dismissing thought, and by taking refuge in faith.

The upshot is the following. At the very least, the task ahead of Hegel is to show that Reflection as a mediation between universal and particular can be accounted for as a genuine unity (Being), without relapsing into the Jacobian thoughtlessness of sense certainty. Hegel must show that exhibiting the constitutive mediation of the object will not lead us to sacrifice the object’s immediacy—although, as we will see, the task will reinvolve a crucial redescription of the key notions of universality, particularity and ground, within the framework of a theory of ‘absolute subjectivity’.<sup>14</sup>

In the *Logic*, the middle section named *Essence* is expressly devoted to the crucial task of synthetizing categories of immediacy with those of mediation (E §65)—of integrating the immediacy of fideism (including its central concept of revelation) with the mediations of the *Aufklärung*. My work intends to be precisely an assessment of that task as carried out in the *Wesenslogik*. But since the Doctrine of Essence builds upon (as I will show in section 6) the 1794 *Wissenschaftslehre* treatment of the *Sein/Reflexion* dynamic, it is not unwise to dwell a little on Fichte’s own position.

#### 4. FICHTE AND THE PROBLEM OF THINKING

Let us introduce the Fichtean perspective on Being and Reflection through a vivid image:

The child, who today eats again from the bread that stilled his hunger yesterday, would never eat from it, would never recognize *the bread* in this bread of today, had he not posited in his consciousness already in

yesterday's bread the absolutely, infinitely repeatable bread, for all past and future, without time or conditions (GA I, 7, 302).

In this particularly lyrical statement, Fichte condenses the Romantic variation on the Aristotelian theme of *thaumazein*, wonder: its true root is in the realization that finitude always seems to be lit up with an infinite dimension. To recognize something as a loaf of bread, is to simultaneously see in it a formal pattern whose objectivity is unaffected by time, a pattern setting metaphysical constraints not only on this particular loaf, but on all possible and actual loaves. Although there are countless varieties of bread, each of them contains an eidetic 'minimal denominator' ("the absolutely repeatable bread") that has normative status, and that decides on what can (and what cannot) count as bread. And a subject recognizes this normativity to be binding for all subjects, not only for himself.

How is it possible that we see in one discrete item of experience the unity of *all* formal structures of the same kind? Obviously, we do not intuit concretely in this loaf all the loaves that ever existed and will exist, in a chinese-box fashion—at best, such a perspective is reserved to God. Since the talk is about repeatability, it is obvious that we intuit not an actual, but a potential infinite. Potentially infinite repetition means, negatively expressed, the apodeictic certainty that all items of such a kind cannot lack this eidetic pattern *A*. Fichte characterizes *A*'s infinite repeatability through the expression  $A=A$  (GA I, 7, 296), which ostensibly symbolizes the constitutive identity cutting across *A*'s possible instantiations.

However, we must hasten to notice that it is only an appearance of the infinite that is present in the finite object of thought, not the infinite itself: "our whole temporal existence is merely appearance of the absolutely eternal, general, unchangeable, in the particular, the changeable" (*ibid* 300); empirical bread is a moving image of the universal bread, in the way that for Plato time is a moving image of the eternal (*Timaeus* 37D 7). Now, it is true that the infinite announces itself in the here and now: I know immediately about *A*'s infinite repeatability. But the actual repetition itself is inescapably incomplete, bound as it is to the temporal, sequential character of experience. The flux of the systematic return of the same is a clue to the fact that the infinite can be experienced only as *analyzed* (*ibid*): that is, totality is for us never in *a here and now*, but only present in its becoming. In sum: although the absolute appears (as infinite repeatability) within each singularity, experience is a sequential analysis delivering us a multiplicity that ill suits the pure unity of the infinite, and that thus constitutes an "indirect knowledge" (*ibid* 302).

Nevertheless, the fact remains that the infinite unity of *Sein* appears, albeit as a potential, *within* the single object of thought: how is this possible? Fichte rejects out of hand the idea that the single object *per se* can be the source of universality: against Bardili's and Reinhold's platonism he polemically asks (his standard move against 'dogmatic,' i.e. realist, positions): how does the subject become aware of the universality allegedly stemming from the particular (*ibid* 302)? The implication here is that, since there is no way to read off universality from particularity without a *metabasis eis allo genos*, and since—nevertheless—thought as such thinks the universal in the particular, it must follow that an "Ideal activity" (*ibid* 304) projects the former upon the latter. And when Fichte claims that the true nature of the self's grasp of "this manifestation of the absolute totality" (*ibid* 293) is that of an intellectual intuition, he is claiming that the experiencing self gazes at, unbeknownst to itself, the infinite repeatability of its own act of stipulating an essence.

What does this tell us about the nature of thinking? For one, that it hinges on universality, but that it cannot count as the source of its universality. The universality at play in thought is one that transcends thinking, and that lets itself be apprehended through a non-discursive intuition. So, thought is a unity of particular and universal, but it has elsewhere the ground of its own unity. True, nowhere does Fichte call this primordial unity *Sein*, since for him that would be a relapse into a Spinozistic 'dogmatism' which makes inexplicable the phenomenon of human freedom. But the point remains that Fichte—just as Jacobi—tries to account for the unity of reflection in terms of a transreflective unity, even if in this case it is the unity of human spontaneity. Intellectual intuition discloses such spontaneity in the shape of an "I-hood, neither subjectivity nor objectivity, but an absolute identity of the two" (*ibid* 294). Thus, thought is a *Reflexion* (since it involves a discrimination between particular and universal), whose unity is accounted for in terms of a unitary, transreflexive activity—Fichte's subject-centered counterpart of Jacobian *Sein*.

More in detail, each act of thought constitutes an object, an  $A=A$  synthesis of unity and multiplicity; this object-constitution is grounded in  $I=I$  as transcendental synthesis of the subject and its positing activities (GA I, 7, 294). This entails that the prediscursive *I* is prey to two contradictory requirements: positing itself as totality (*Sein* as unity of self and its operations) and as a part (self as opposed to its world-positing operations). This results in a peculiar oscillating motion (*Schweben*, WL 194) whereby the *I* is one moment on the verge of grasping itself as mind/world totality, and the next, it is on the verge of contracting itself into a finite, limited entity (WL 193). That is, Fichte unites the joint requirements of finitude and infinity by allocating each



of them to a different instant in time (WL 194). And this operation cannot be carried out by thinking, but is instead a matter of the transcendental imagination as the ground of thinking, a ground which oscillates between the separation and the synthesis of the two terms. This incessant wavering is precisely a manifestation of the impossibility (from the Fichtean perspective) to truly synthesize the subject and object and furthermore one which operates in pre-conceptual terms:

This original *positing* and *dividing* is (*N.B.* [sic]) neither *thinking*, nor *intuiting* nor *sensing* nor *desiring* nor *feeling*, etc. Instead, it is the *entire activity* of the human mind, which has no name, never occurs in consciousness, *and cannot be grasped by means of concepts* [ . . . ] This activity itself is in no way *determined*. One enters my philosophy by means of what is absolutely *incomprehensible*

(*Letter to Reinhold, July 2, 1795*).<sup>15</sup>

This brilliant solution was to prove terribly influential for the *Frühromantiker*: it is hard to imagine, for instance, Hyperion's wavering between the nostalgia for the One and the sensuous enjoyment of the finite, without recalling the "self-conflict" (WL 215) of the Fichtean Ego. Or think of Schelling's conception of Nature as a river: as flux, *Natur* is unitary, and finite creatures are marginal eddies that break up only *momentarily* the straightforward flux of the river: they emerge one moment only to disappear the next (SW 3, 289). This solution is also necessary for Fichte: the *Not-I* cannot be reabsorbed into the finite, lest consciousness itself be annihilated (WL 245–246). The upshot of this genetic account of the origin of thought as the loss of a pristine unity (a secularized account of the Myth of the Fall) is that the problem is insoluble on the terrain of thought.

This is not a disheartening prospect for Fichte. Although philosophical thought is the result of an original act of arrogance that revealed to us our finitude, and that persists only to remedy the damage it has done (GA III, 2, 392), it is also a *felix culpa* that through the very perception of its inadequacy points us to something better. That is, it opens up the field of praxis as the sphere in which the *Not-I* can be made identical with the *I*: the fact that we cannot *think* mind and world as one, discloses our deepest vocation, the incessant humanization of the landscape, i.e. its being *made* to be like the mind (*Concerning Human Dignity*, in EW 83–85). This stark Enlightenment streak differs markedly from Hegel's Aristotelianism, for whom theory is the "holy of holies" (SL 25) in the "richly ornamented temple" (*ibid*) of the sentiments, constitution, ethical customs and virtues of a nation. Interestingly, when Hegel argues

that the *ought*—as a deferment of the completion of praxis to infinity—is a sign of thought's laziness (E §55, R), he turns against the Enlightenment the charge of idleness which Fichte had leveled against theory for its own sake (*Some lectures concerning the Scholar's vocation*; in EW, 172).

The early Hegel himself was sensitive to the problem of the unity of particular and universal contained in any judgmental act (F&K, 69). Like Fichte, he was very sympathetic to the idea of an archetypal faculty of imagination as a solution to the problem, viewing it as "a truly speculative Idea" (F&K, 71). This unity for Hegel is the primordial unity of universal (the subjective) and particular (the objective) (*ibid*), a pure unity which presents itself to consciousness in the diremptive unity of judgment (*ibid*). The unity of the copulative 'is' is only the understanding's copy (*Abbild*) of a nondiscursive original (*Urbild*) of reason (DS, 90). But, by the time he wrote the *Phenomenology*, his view on transcendental explanations had changed—he believed himself capable to account reflectively for the unity at play in judgments.<sup>16</sup>

More in detail, the later Hegelian strategy is to show that the tension between the unavoidable articulation of thought and the unity required by spontaneity can be resolved *immanently*, that is, within thinking itself—without a transcendental appeal to the "absolutely incomprehensible" of the imagination. Hegel's goal is to *think* the object as one: to unite its categorized portion (the part captured by 'A is B') with its extracategorical residue (the judgment 'A is not B'), and also to think thought as one, i.e. to think the unity of those opposed judgments. Finally, since each of the two judgments is the exhibition of a one-sided unity of object and thinking, to think the unity of two judgments is to think exhaustively the unity of *Sein* and *Reflexion*. This is a tall order indeed, since the goal of thinking a whole as a unity lands us in an ostensibly unsolvable paradox: to think two opposed judgments together amounts, in effect, to thinking *A is and is not P*. This debars a Jacobian silence, the realm of ostensive gesticulations that preserve unity by simply saying 'A.' But sterile as it may strike one, this mystical attitude bears out the fact that the thinking of a whole as such appears to be impossible: to think is to particularize, since the very idea of an actual part is at once the destruction of that whole. Hegel will succeed only if he can cogently persuade us of the contrary. This is the *pons asinorum* that decides between the ultimate irrationalism of Fichte and the late Schelling, and the rationalism of Hegel. The *Logic* is the sustained attempt to have us see the truth of the latter option.

To see why thinking self-reflexivity could not be an option for Fichte, let us turn to a brief analysis of *Urtheilslehre*, i.e. his theory of judgment. For Fichte thought and judgment are coextensive, since he endorses Kant's

reduction of thought to discursivity, and of the object of thought to the subject of a judgment.<sup>17</sup> An *Urtheil* for Fichte is a discursive expression of unity:

Thus in the proposition 'A=B,' A designates what is now being posited; B what is already encountered as posited.—*Is* expresses the passage of the *self* from positing to reflection on what has been posited (SK 97, *footnote*).

Consciousness poses a serious problem for a theory of pure spontaneity like Fichte's: if it is true that all I am is pure activity, how do I reconcile this with the fact that there is a world for me? If I take A to be an object for me, a *not-I*, then not only do I posit myself as  $I=I$  continuity, but I problematically posit the state of affairs  $I\neq I$ . And it is here that judgment emerges as a two-tiered identity-preserving gesture: first, since A can be my object only as  $A=B$  judgment, it turns out that A hinges on the same law of self-identity that defines the Ego. Indeed, if I say  $A=B$ , I also entail that A is self-continuous in its relation with B: that is,  $A=B$  entails  $A=A$ . In a nutshell, the object is not the other of the Ego, in the sense that it shares the defining Ego's self-identity. Second, the self-continuity of the object is made to depend on the transcendental unity of the Ego, a point borne out by Fichte's revisionary construal of the copulative 'is': it is not the expression of the determinate presence of any object as an irreducible fact, but the unity of the synthetic activity of the I: "*Is* expresses the passage of the *self* from positing to reflection on what has been posited" (*ibid*)—the copula expresses the unity of self understood as synthetic transition from intuition to conceptual act.<sup>18</sup>

If we take seriously Fichte's construal of judgment as the stipulation of unity between two posits, it turns out that it is a purely *internal* dichotomy that must be accounted for: judgment is not so much the unity between self and world, but the logical unity between two distinct, subordinate logical acts of the self—the subject-concept and the predicate (GA II, 4, 185).<sup>19</sup> And it is precisely the idea of an internal dichotomy that Fichte articulated in his fascinating idea (tremendously seminal for postKantian thinkers, especially Hölderlin) of judgment as *Ur-theil*, a twofold partition of an original unity (GA II, 4, 182).

More in detail: the theoretical (i.e. judging) attitude aims at integrating within the I's spontaneous self-relation  $I=I$  what would otherwise be a problematic split between the different activities of positing and reflecting. Indeed, for the self to posit A amounts to a self-contradiction: qua position of an *other*, it denies to the self (and for Fichte the self is *just* its activity) the continuity that should belong to it by definition. If the self is  $I=I$ , purely self-related and continuous activity, then the self's activity of positing A must remain in some identifiable sense the activity of positing  $I=I$ . But does  $A=B$

really solve the problem? Before we glossed on the fact that the  $A=B$  structure of non-tautological judgment seems to entail the unacceptable discontinuity  $I=\neg I$ . However, the third concept  $X$  (whose intension is the overlap between the subject and the predicate) expresses as *one* continuous act of comprehension the two subordinate activities of positing and reflection, preserving the  $I=I$  essence of the self and still allowing us to posit  $A=A$  in the very moment that we say  $A=B$ ; *I* am not straying from the essence of ‘bird’ if I predicate ‘animal’ of it.

We cannot, however, consider tautologies on a par with other judgments: ‘the table is a table,’ ‘the bird is a bird’ do not really constitute an act of thinking, if to think is to go beyond a given immediacy. These tautologies are rather conditions for thought: if I am to think of a bird, my thought will have to conform to a pattern that both defines a bird, and that *restrains* what I can think about, if I still am to think about a bird. Thetic judgments of the sort  $A=A$  are beyond reflection (since they articulate *a complete* identity, as opposed to the partial one established by *Reflexion* between two opposites (SK 114)), yet they guide the choice of the appropriate predicate  $B$ : a judgment ascribes *eo ipso* something *else* to a subject, but it has sense only if this ‘else’ is somewhat continuous with the nature of the subject. That is, in constructing  $A=B$  we take our bearings by  $A=A$ .<sup>20</sup>

And this brings us to a crucial point, decisive for Hegel’s confrontation with Fichte. For Fichte,  $I=I$  cannot be constructed as judgment, that is, we cannot *think* the continuity of the *I* with its own operations: it is because thinking (reflection) seizes upon one continuous note between two entities that remain different in other respects. That is, reflection can only establish a formal identity, that of a repetition of the same leaving outside an unexplained otherness. As he puts it “no abstraction is possible without reflection, no reflection is possible without abstraction” (*On the Concept of the Wissenschaftslehre*, in EW, 123). Indeed, closer inspection of any non-tautological judgment reveals that its overarching logical unity is not exhaustive. In the judgment “bird is an animal,” ‘bird’ is not fully coextensive with ‘animal,’ insofar as it lacks e.g. ‘four legs,’ ‘scales’ or ‘fur’ (SK 114)—the synthetic bond between the two concepts is the mere notion of organized, living matter, we leave out of the ‘bird’/‘animal’ synthesis the idea of the specific difference of the various animal kinds (*ibid*). It is precisely here that judgment seems to fall short of its unifying task, since the inclusion of two distinct logical acts of the self in a third is partial, and turning on a residual, mutual logical externality of subject and predicate: “Each positing [of identity] is also an *exclusion*, and the positive judgment can also be contemplated as a negative” (GA 11, 4, 184). In the ‘bird is an animal,’ ‘bird’ and ‘capable of specifying itself into vertebrate or invertebrate’ are still separated, which means also that ‘the bird *is not* an animal.’

Therefore, the reflexive unity the self attains in judgment (and enshrined in the 'is') is imperfect, because it must lean upon implicit division (the 'is not' lurking beneath the "*A is B*" implies "*A in part =  $\neg A$* " (SK 110), which further entails that  $A \neq A$ . That is, in the judgment  $A=B$ , *A* is internally split between a predicated and an unpredicated portion: reflection splinters the being of its object into a reflected and unreflected portion.<sup>21</sup> A telltale sign of this is the awareness that the 'is' does not tell us the whole story about the subject, hence the awareness of the supplementary, negative judgment: Fichte is all too aware of this, and goes so far as to make into a law of all thinking, as we have seen—"There is no knowledge of *what* anything is, without our concurrent thinking of what it is *not*" (*Wissenschaftslehre Nova Methodo*, ed. Jacob, 368). But this simply means that thought sacrifices the unity of its object, since it lacerates it into two contrary judgments, i.e. two contrary thoughts.

In the transcendental judgment, the finite I can never integrate the Not-I into itself, on pains of losing its determinate identity—this means that the world must ultimately remain its perennial other. In empirical judgment, the object of thought can never be in full internal relation with the predicate (the category under which we think the object), on pains of losing the minimal articulation required for non-tautological discursivity. It is clear that this is a problem for Fichte: what accounts for the unity of the opposed operations of reflection and abstraction? In other words, what is the unity of the I's operations of differentiation and identification? Trying to answer this question, Fichte unified the discontinuity intrinsic to discursivity, in something non-discursive—in the unity of an oscillation between two opposites:

Knowledge is suspended between the two moments (unity and separation) and is destroyed if it does not find itself between them (*Wissenschaftslehre* 1801, §10).

But the oscillatory nature of imagination's unity shows, once more, that Fichte is unwilling to posit even a non-discursive effective synthesis of subject and object.

## 5. HEGEL'S ENGAGEMENT WITH FICHTE IN THE *DIFFERENCE*, *FAITH AND KNOWLEDGE* AND THE *LECTURES ON THE HISTORY OF PHILOSOPHY*

Hegel's criticism of the shortcomings of Fichte's transcendental imagination (which we will analyze shortly) has to be taken in the context of what he sees as Kant's central intuition. That is, according to Hegel, Kant's transcendental

synthesis of apperception contains the crucial insight of an *absolute* unity of an antinomy: in transcendental imagination, the singular (the subject) and the universal (the predicate) are archetypally one, without residues (F&K, 69).<sup>22</sup> But then Kant spoils this central intuition by constructing a theory of experience where the unity between subject and object is no longer absolute, but merely formal: the categories are not completely one with sensory intuitions. This is because Kant's atomistic view of sense data (wherein he follows the British empiricist tradition) forbids him to think that the given data are intrinsically capable of unifying themselves into complexes: thus the multiplicity of the given is not really explained by the unity it attains in the cognizing self. The identity of the unitary self and the manifold world turns out to consist in the mere repetition of the self (the representation 'I think') in the plurality of the given: but this formal (and hence incomplete) identity is an unavoidable result as long as we remain bound to a dualistic horizon. If only Kant would have held onto transcendental imagination as a "middle" (F&K 132), the third holding together archetypally unity and multiplicity!<sup>23</sup> Similarly, the Hegel of the *Differenzschrift* believes that Fichte's philosophy strays away from its own central insight, just as speculative as the Kantian one: the  $I=I$  as a subject/object identity is placed at the center of his system.<sup>24</sup> The shortcoming, however, is that the  $I=I$  principle is a merely relative one, opposed to the mind/world opposition of empirical consciousness: instead of trying to achieve a mind/world synthesis, Fichte tries instead to eliminate the dichotomy by nullifying (*vernichtet*) one of its terms—namely, the object (DS 101). That is, *qua* object of our theoretical experience, the object is supposed to be merely exhibited as free (if unconscious) self-limitation. Now, since this self-limitation remains inexplicable, the object's final nullification can only be achieved through its modification at the hands of the practical subject. But the destruction of the object can never be complete, since that would entail the correlative obliteration of finite subjectivity, a price which Fichte isn't willing to pay (DS 132).

The general point that Hegel makes is that Fichte's Ego is prey to the separations of reflection: by its very nature, reflection cannot seize upon absolute unity (an identity that leaves no residual difference between the relata), but must instead break it up into two propositions, the one expressing identity, the other dichotomy (DS 106). True, the Ego is an antinomial unity of opposites since—*qua* transcendental, pure self-consciousness—it is "both identity and duplication at once" (DS 122). But, on the other hand, Fichte reduces the  $I=I$  to a *relative* antinomial unity, since it is a pure act generated by abstraction from the empirical manifold, an identity leaving sensible difference outside itself. This means that the Ego suffers from an internal fracture: "the essence of

the Ego and its positing do not coincide" (*ibid*). That is, the Ego is supposed to be its own object qua self-positing  $I=I$  identity, but instead it faces a separated other (the world) as its object. As Hegel puts it in different words, the  $I$ 's relation to the world "is merely a having" (DS 142), implying that the Ego *is not* the object: "the producer and the product do not coincide" (DS 131).

We can see such lack of coincidence from this angle: the Ego by definition is supposed to be freedom (as pure self-identity), but its appearance (the finite ego/non-ego dyad) "is not [self] identical, [it is] something finite and unfree" (*ibid*). From a categorial standpoint, the transcendental Ego fails to preserve its defining self-identity in the empirical mind/world dichotomy because the relationship between transcendental unity and empirical bifurcation is causal (DS 155): transcendental identity strives to suppress the empirical mind/world difference. But causality can only exert itself on a substratum, and thus presupposes that we begin from division of absolute opposites: having done this, the possibility of a genuine synthesis is impossible (DS 126). Fichte proceeds through quantitative syntheses which are merely a mutual insulation of the poles through the limit—operations which for Hegel are carried out by *Reflexion*. But, again, it is just this insulation that prevents the exhibition of the nugatoriness of the independence of the two poles, a requisite for absolute (i.e. residue-less) synthesis.

A year later (1802), Hegel's judgment of Fichte gets harsher. Now, according to the analysis in *Faith and Knowledge*, Fichte does not even reach the level of Kant, in that the  $I=I$  is a principle admitting of no inward difference, it is just a flat repetition of the same. If  $I=I$  as the grounding of the self is a pure unity, then the step that leads from pure self-apprehension to the experience of an empirical plurality is bound to remain inexplicable (F&K, 154). This is a defective position, because the setting-up of the problem is such that a genuine unity cannot be achieved. To be sure, Fichte's program is to reduce empirical givenness to an affection of the subject, but by doing so he merely relocates multiplicity in the Ego, who still remains confronted by problematic difference (F&K, 155).

And yet, Hegel adds ironically, this defectively pure identity "has the advantage of carrying the immediate necessity of self-fulfillment within itself" (F&K, 157). The gist of this is that, according to Hegel, Fichte cheats: the only way that the  $I=I$  can feel its inadequacy and the need of an inward articulation that enriches it with difference is by taking its bearings from the idea of a totality (F&K, 157). What is more, if one begins with a part, one will never reach completeness through the addition of further parts, since all that this can give us is a non-genuine identity: a sum, not a whole. It is here that Hegel acknowledges the Jacobian criticism of the analytic procedure seeking a reconstitution of the

whole through a synthesis of elementary components. Hegel declares that “cognition that is genuine begins with the absolute, and the absolute is neither a part nor incomplete” (F&K, 159). This is Hegel’s position while he is still influenced by Schelling’s philosophy, but already by the time of the *Phenomenology*, he will object to a beginning which immediately shoots us into the absolute as from a pistol. Thus (by way of anticipation) we will see that the *Fichte-Kritik* carried out in the mature (1813) Doctrine of Essence does not follow the Schellingian path of rejecting at once one-sided principles, adopting instead the strategy of showing that the absolute is present *in* the finite, in the sense that any one-sided principle is always ‘the other of itself,’ and thus implicitly already a whole.<sup>25</sup>

This insight is at work even in these early essays, albeit here the self-destructive dialectic of the categories of finitude is seen only as propaedeutic exercise for the nondiscursive intuition of totality. If the Ego is to embrace totality, it must realize that its isolated essence at bottom is that of a *Nichts* (DS 101), since if it sticks to its own formal irreducibility, it ensures the irreducibility of the other as well. The point is made more sharply in *Glauben und Wissen*: it is not that Fichte’s philosophy is guilty of nihilism (as Jacobi had protested), but rather that it has not pushed the nihilistic agenda to its consummation (F&K 169; Düsing 131). Conversely, Schelling’s absolute has the merit of achieving a genuine subject/object synthesis because it is the simultaneous annihilation of their respective discreteness (DS 155). Unlike Schelling and Fichte, however, Hegel adds that it is indeed the task of an idealism as logic (i.e. a metaphysics of subjectivity that is from the very beginning reflexive, as opposed to idealisms *à la* Fichte and Schelling that found the self on the transreflexive grounds) to see that the subject is *nothing*, because it is intrinsically contradictory—it *is* its opposite (Düsing 132). In other words, given enough rope, reflection and its categories will ‘hang themselves,’ since *Reflexion* (as Hegel would have it) cannot maintain the separations it institutes between its defining concepts. In the early Jena period (1801–1804) Hegel believes that the negative outcome of reflection must be “synthesized with absolute intuition” of the one substance (DS 94).<sup>26</sup> In sum, *Reflexion* at this stage of Hegel’s development is only the vestibule to philosophy proper.

If the subterranean Fichtean anxiety is the fear of the obliteration of finitude as such, is Hegel correct when he claims that this dichotomizing anxiety stubbornly refuses to acknowledge the unavoidable, namely that an  $A=A$  identity always already contains within itself its other  $A=B$ ? Must *Reflexion* willy-nilly ‘go to the ground,’ in the peculiar Hegelian sense of a foundational self-contradiction? I will reserve a more sustained discussion of



this crucial claim for the next chapter, specifically in the detailed analysis of the Hegelian dialectic of Reflection and its formal laws.

For the moment, it is important to notice that Hegel recognizes a speculative moment in Fichte: the elimination of the subject/world divide, albeit as a matter of mere faith (F&K 170). But one must also realize why Fichte could not desire the actual elimination of the dichotomy, the complete coincidence of the Ego and the Non-Ego which would be *nothing* (F&K, 171). This is because the obliteration of the opposites is also the obliteration of the contrastive mutual determination that allows us to identify both Ego and non-Ego as *somethings*. But Hegel believes that Fichte's fear of the absolute (under the guise of a fear of the annihilation of the subject) is misguided. Indeed, the first step in philosophy is to recognize the absolute nothing (F&K 169): this is Hegel's way of saying that reflection upon any panoply of principles must recognize that each of these principles cannot sustain its discreteness vis-à-vis the others, and must collapse in a self-contradiction. But what Kant, Jacobi and Fichte as champions of the "metaphysics of subjectivity" (F&K 189) fail to understand is that "the infinite grief" (F&K 190) where all determinacy (including the subject) succumbs to an internal self-contradiction is only a moment, "and no more than a moment" (*ibid*). In a nutshell, Hegel is claiming that this self-contradiction not only destroys determinacy, but *sustains* it as well: the middle as the identity of the two poles is the erasure of their reciprocal standing over-against the other, but also what (paradoxically) enables that standing.<sup>27</sup> Less abstrusely: unity with the whole ultimately fulfills the self, instead of destroying it.

In the *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, Hegel makes it clear to what extent Fichte's position has to be considered as a genuine improvement on Kant. On the one hand, Kant has touched upon the nerve of the problem of thinking: if to think is to join a universal with a particular, what is the ground of that unity? The correct insight behind Kant's synthesis of apperception was that the unity could not be *a posteriori*, since then the relata would be substrata indifferent to the bond imposed upon them—instead, universal and particular, thought and its object had to be archetypally one. Unfortunately, Kant's insight failed to inspire the concrete working out of his theory of experience, which relapsed into an impositionistic model: the universal failed to capture the essence of particularity as such, and remained quite external to it. Indeed, Kant's idea of the sensuous particular is that it is a *given*, and thus something that is to be passively strung together by the subjective universal. For instance, if sense-data *a* and *b* are to be joined together in a causal relation, we cannot take our bearings by *a* and *b* themselves in order to determine the order of their sequence: from the perspective of those particulars, the causal sequence *a-b* is every bit as possible as the

sequence *b-a*. Thus, Kant is guilty of an “inconsistency” (LHP III, 478): if the particular was (correctly) supposed to be archetypally one with the universal, then “it is in the first place demanded by consistency that particular thoughts should appear as if produced by necessity from the original unity of the ego, and in that way justified” (*ibid*).

The merit of Fichte is having removed this inconsistency: like Kant, he starts from the idea of a subject-object identity, but he tries then to tease out the very idea of universality and particularity from this primordial identity—the sensuous particularity is deduced from the Ego (*ibid* 481), and the categories (the universal) are not collected rhapsodically, but are connected themselves to the Ego (*ibid* 483).

## 6. THE DOCTRINE OF ESSENCE AND ITS ENGAGEMENT WITH FICHTE

Where does the *Wesenslogik* come into all this? I wish to claim that it builds upon Fichte’s dialectic of the Ego and the Non-Ego, and that it constitutes an immanent, reconstructive critique of that dialectic as a way to solve the problem of the unity between universal and particular involved in any act of thinking. What Hegel likes about that dialectic is the fact that the object of thought (the Not-Ego) is not ‘picked up’ from the outside as it is in Kant’s theory of experience, so that then we are left with the problem of figuring out how the universal can latch on to it. Instead, according to Fichte, the Not-Ego is the constitutive byproduct of a self-defining act of the self, the result of an archetypally monistic activity which breaks itself into an activity of self-intentionality and an activity of intending the *other*. The universal  $I=I$  of self-consciousness relies on the contrastive carving out of a sphere of intentionality that is *not* characterized by that defining self-equality: the Not-Ego simply is the absence of that defining identity, it is essentially the difference from self-identity (as lack of defining self-repetition, the Not-Ego is non-universal). In this horizon, universality and particularity are equiprimordial as far as their genesis is concerned, and Hegel approves of this.

What he does *not* approve of is that they are set up in such a way that their unification required by any empirical judgment remains inexplicable. To be sure, Fichte claims that thinking any object in its determinacy—through the ascription of a universal—involves the transcendental presupposition of the object as a self-causing entity, whose “determinations are brought forth in themselves, that is, through the intrinsic inner efficacy of nature” (SK 270). In this sense, the object enjoys an  $A=A$  self-continuity in its own properties, and its isomorphism with the  $I=I$  structure of the thinking Ego should contribute

to an explanation of its intelligibility. But the problem is that the defining self-continuity of the object is one more projection of the Ego: "This property is carried out of the self and over to the thing by the drive to determination [i.e. the drive to appropriate cognitively/practically the object]" (SK 272). To avoid this impositionistic view, Fichte should instead show (but unfortunately he doesn't) that the particular object of thought is intrinsically structured with the same self-relational structure that defines thinking or, in Hegelese, he should show that particularity is always already universal. This involves a most problematic point, as we will see: the claim that a thought-determination is constitutively self-contradictory.

The basic categorial architecture of the doctrine of Essence systematically replicates this universal/particular opposition, with the intent of showing its ultimate indefensibility via an immanent dialectic. Indeed, the categorial structure of the *Wesenslogik* is essentially dyadic (we always get categorial pairs in essence), and the first category stands for pure, originary self-identity, while the second category embodies a derivative *absence* of self-identity—the idea being that each categorial dyad re-enacts the Ego/Non-Ego polarity of the Fichtean self. Consider, for instance, the 'cause/effect' pair: a cause is supposed to remain itself in the effect (and thus exhibit the  $A=A$  continuity), while the effect is by definition supposed to be a lack of ontological independence, something that would not be there without a cause.

One difficulty thematized by this Hegelian reconstruction of the dyadic dialectic of Fichte is that—although it rightly emphasizes the equiprimordial genesis of the universal and the particular—it fails to effectively *sustain* their distinction. If we define the Not-Ego as essentially a *nichts*, lack of defining  $A=A$  identity, and the only identity that we think in it is the one the transcendental Ego imposes upon it, it turns out that the Non-Ego, the particular, is only an empty husk, and that the transcendental Ego is the universal of a *nothing*. But then we may equally claim that the universal of a nothing is itself a nothing: if the world is just a figment of the productive imagination, then the Ego defines itself via a contrast with a fiction, and thus its basis is fictive. Hegel condemns just this sterility of an Ego realizing itself through finitudes that are themselves nugatory (LHP III, 505). The doctrine of essence starts from this imperfect point, with a view to immanently criticize it: essence is just "reflection [ . . . ] the movement of nothing through nothing and back to itself" (L II, 66). Reflection is the process whereby the Ego—through the abstraction of a nugatory difference ("through nothing")—achieves self-identity, but an empty one (the return of nothing "back to itself"). Reflection is thus intrinsically contradictory,

because it involves the intentionality toward otherness while at the same time suppressing the very idea of the other.

*Per se* this is definitely not a negative result, *pace* the Jacobian outrage at the mind/world dichotomy turning into nothing: the positive result of the mutual nullification of the Ego and Non-Ego whereby we get  $+1-1=0$  (F&K, 171) is that we finally overcome their separation. The problem is that Fichte wants to avoid this result at all costs, because he believes that the result of the inner contradiction whereby the Ego *is* the Non-Ego is a loss of all intelligibility and determinacy. Hegel is right only if he can prove Fichte to be wrong on this count, namely if he can show that contradiction has also a *positive* meaning: that the collapse into each other of the two poles of intentionality is also what makes possible intentionality in the first place. His way of doing so is attacking the contradiction-avoiding devices set up by the *Wissenschaftslehre*.

I repeat: one of the aims of the Doctrine of Essence is to show that Fichte cannot avoid the absolute *nichts* he so much dreads. The self-identity of the universal cannot be kept apart from the difference-relation vis-à-vis particularity. Hegel's systematic strategy is twofold. First, he shows that the identity-pole cannot maintain its putative claims to ontological primacy, and that its being is every bit as derivative as that of the alleged inessential, the Not-Ego. Second, that the coprimacy of these two poles requires us to think their *identity* in a third, the ground. Fichte is wrong with his divisive construal of *Grund*, Hegel wants to show: far from being the locus of non-contradiction, the ground is contradictory because it a unity of differents—more specifically, of identity and difference.

More in detail, how does the *Wesenslogik* solve the tension between two opposing acts of position (the  $A=A$  of universality) and of opposition (the difference between universal and particular)? At a very general level, the systematic resolution of this tension within pure thinking is solved through the ushering in of a third category that unitarily accounts for the preceding categorial conflict. That is, the third category plays a synthetic role: it tries to show how thought can be for itself through opposed categories, and yet still be unitary; Fichte synthesizes opposites through a *Grund* which exhibits the logical overlap between extremes. But the problem with Fichte is that his synthetic conception of thinking masks a fundamentally divisive intent, as becomes clear in this very revealing aside on the nature of the operations of *Einbildungskraft*

We interpolate some X in between them [i.e. *I* and *Not-I*], on which both may act, so that they may also work indirectly upon one another. But we soon discover that there must again be some point in this X, at which *I* and *Not-I* are in immediate contact. To prevent

this, we interpose between them and replace the sharp boundary by a new link, Y. But it soon appears that here too, as in X, there must be a point at which the two opponents come up against each other directly. And so it would go on forever, if the knot were not cut, rather than loosed, by an absolute decree of reason [ . . . ]: Since there is no way of reconciling the *Not-I* with the *I*, let there be no *Not-I* at all! (SK 137).

Against Fichte's synthesis of the imagination, Hegel's program eschews a synthesis that is just the mechanical unity of two finite quantities (the *I* and the *Not-I*). On the contrary, let me say by way of anticipation that the *Logic* develops a synthesis that is the internal relation between two distinct logical acts: a) the self-categorization of the *I*=*I* continuity of thought's presence to itself and b) the categorial articulation of a remainder. More precisely, what is at stake is an internal relation of *meanings*: Hegel has to show not only that the institution of self-identity is parasitical on the institution of self-difference (and viceversa) but also that this codependency reveals a unity of the respective meanings of identity and difference: it is part of *the nature* of self-identity to be difference (Düsing 317).

There is a presupposition underpinning such an understanding of synthesis, where each term fulfills itself in and *as* its other: a finite, determinate category as such is "the other of itself" (SL 118)—another notorious Hegelian coinage, but one which is absolutely at the heart of his project (cf. Henrich 1982, p. 160-ff). This means, for one, that any category hinges on a tension between its one-sided determinate shape (i.e. its this-and-not-that structure), and the fact that the *limit* that is responsible for that determinate configuration is *internal* to the category itself. What is meant by 'limit' is the opposite, defining meaning and by 'internal' is meant that such opposite meaning is part and parcel of the meaning of the defined, so only if division between *A* and *B* is suppressed, does *A* fulfill its true nature. One example (which as pertaining to the *Realphilosophie* can have here only an anticipatory value): pain is a uniquely immediate awareness of one's finitude. This awareness is made possible by the fact that the state of finitude *A* is perceived as a restriction, which is only possible if the sentient being intuitively itself as an *A+B* totality. This means that pain *A* qua deficitary condition turns crucially upon its implicit envisioning of a non-deficitary state: pain *A* is the 'other of itself.' The self-transcending dimension inherent in pain is the reason why Hegel claims that "Living things have the privilege of pain compared with the lifeless" (E §60, R).

Hegel suggests precisely this, when he deliberately exploits the ambiguity of *Bestimmung*, understood as limit and 'vocation,' i.e. a call to realize

one's true identity via a constitutive engagement with otherness (SL 119). However, if the point has plausibility for living things, it is far from being obvious as far as basic metaphysical categories are concerned: why should a form *A* have within itself the contrastive otherness  $\sim A$ ?

Hegel tries to substantiate it through a recourse to Plato, namely through the category of the other, *to heteron* (SL 118). According to Hegel's construal, since Plato grants self-standing status to 'the other,' the latter is "the other in its own self, that is, the other of itself" (*ibid*). The inference is far from being pellucid: Hegel moves from *a*) the idea that otherness—qua one of the *megista* ghene—is such by virtue of itself, to *b*) 'the other' is self-different, and hence the 'other of itself'. Presumably, the underlying point is that to speak of an 'other' *überhaupt* entails an appeal to a contrastive backdrop against which 'the other' is indeed an other. Now, since *to heteron* is an independent formal monad, it cannot have such contrastive background outside itself but must have it inside itself, hence 'the other' turns out to be internally discontinuous, 'the other of itself' (*ibid*). But it is far from clear that this is a correct construal of Plato. For one, the thought of an *internal* discontinuity entails that 'the other' is *eo ipso* also the *same* as itself—but the Eleatic Stranger insists on a primordial separateness of the forms 'same' and 'other' (Rosen 1983, 272).

I want to claim that Hegel misreads Plato on the issue of the 'other of itself' because he operates with some Fichtean assumptions. We have seen that Fichte gives a genetic account of the category of opposition, by tracing it back to a primordial act of the productive imagination: the very possibility of thought qua intentional attitude requires the spontaneous position of a sphere of otherness. Now, the radicalism of Fichte's solution consists in the fact that this oppositional configuration must itself be produced by the self, and cannot be passively intuited (SK 104–105). Fichte makes a cogent point, when he says extension, impenetrability, color, etc. are undeniable facts of experience, but that there is no logical relation between those qualities and the idea of their difference from the self; this can only be the result of a free hermeneutical stance (*ibid*). If this is true, opposition is an activity in the sense of an op-position, *Entgegen-setzen*: a spontaneous decision that any *X* fulfilling certain criteria is to be counted as *my* other. This is an important step in Hegel's direction: otherness is itself a product of spontaneity, it is the other of the I.

Nevertheless, if we leave it at this stark dualism, there is not much in common with the Hegelian internal-relations program. But the next step is telling: "*In the I I oppose a divisible Not-I to the divisible I*" (SK 110). This is a compressed formulation of the original partition of the productive imagination: the

finite I and the finite Not-I are contained within the absolute I qua transcendental *Einbildungskraft*—subject and object are both products of spontaneity. But this means that the limit of the I is *internal* to the I itself it is the Ego, not *Plato's to heteron*, that is truly 'the other of itself' in the sense of having a purely *internal* discontinuity.

But at this point, Hegel parts company with Fichte. For Fichte, it is the Absolute I that has an inner limit, and that thus is its own other, conversely, the finite I relates to the not-I as to an external limit. There is no "series of shapes prescribed by its own nature" (PhG §77) which could lead Fichtean natural consciousness to "its purification into Spirit" (*ibid*). The unitary, comprehensive mind/world perspective is available only to the transcendental imagination, while empirical consciousness must unavoidably perceive itself as a spontaneity hemmed in by a world of objectivity. Fichte candidly admits that "all reality, *for us* being understood [ . . . ] is brought forth solely by the imagination" (SK 202): qua finite agents, we systematically hide from ourselves the poietic side through which we generate a world. This clandestinely self-imposed limitation that sets the frame of ordinary experience is necessary, because were the finite I to perceive the *Not-I* as fully its *own* other, it would cease to be able to define itself as a striving will—Hegel perceptively individuates here the root of the Fichtean anxiety (E §234, Z).

But an equally fundamental reason for Fichte's refusal to internalize the limit in the finite I, is his adherence to the classic postulate of rationalism: a thing cannot be itself and its other. It may be objected that the Absolute I sins against that postulate, since it is composed of two different parts. Fichte's way of parrying this rejoinder is to develop a *quantitative* notion of totality. That is, although the finite *I* and the *Not-I* are mutually opposed quanta of activity—and in this respect qualitatively different—they are homogeneous as activity *überhaupt*, regardless of the respective directions of the activities themselves (SK 126). In this last, purely quantitative aspect, the Absolute I = (finite I + *Not I*), it is a "quantum in which all others are contained, and which can serve as a measure for all of them" (SK 132). This means that the Absolute *I* is indifferent, as quantity, to the respective limitations of the finite I and the *Not-I*; Fichte, unlike Hegel, does not want to admit death (i.e. negativity) into the Absolute. The problem is that Fichte cannot explain why the Absolute I should posit two mutually opposed quantities within itself, even if this opposition does not threaten its quantitative indifference. It is precisely this indifference that makes the transition to the position of finite quantities inexplicable, and forces Fichte to resort to the *Anstoß*, the factum of a 'shock' bending inwardly an originally linear spontaneous activity, and generating within the Absolute *I* two mutually opposed quantities (SK 203).

If Hegel wants to assert the claim of an internal limit, and thus the possibility of being the other of itself, he must attack this mutual indifference of universal and particular. It is just this that he sets out to do in the *Wesenslogik*, which hinges on a conceptual structure that replicates the basic *I/Not-I* dialectic of the *Wissenschaftslehre*.

Essence is, on the whole, that which *Quantity* was in the sphere of *Being*: absolute indifference vis-à-vis the limit. But Quantity is this indifference in an immediate determination, and the limit is in quantity as an immediate external determinateness (. . . the external limit is necessary to quantity and is affirmatively present in it (*ist an ihr seiend*). Conversely, determinateness in Essence is not affirmatively present; it is only posited by Essence itself, it is not free, it is only in relationship to the unity of essence. The negativity of Essence is Reflection, and the determinations are reflected, posited through Essence itself, and present in it as sublated (L II, 5).

The structural analogies are visible: Essence is the categorial equivalent of the absolute I, since it *contains* elements it has posited—the ‘limit’ is the internal boundary that marks off two opposite, subordinated elements. Essence is indifferent (*gleichgültig*) vis-à-vis those elements: their particular nature does not affect the nature of essence itself—just as in Fichte the finite Ego/Non-Ego complex does not affect in the least the unity of the Absolute Ego. And the reverse is true: the self-identity of the Ego (universal) and the difference of the Not-Ego (particular) are not ‘free,’ which means that they have a derivative nature that falls short of the self-standing character of the Absolute Ego. Only if and when each of them incorporates in its own meaning the meaning of the contrastive other, will they achieve thematic ontological independence. Hegel tries to show, through an immanent critique of this position, that the mutual externality of particular and universal is false, and that each pole *is*, indeed, the ‘other of itself. The ultimate aim in all this is a new vision of ‘universal’ and ‘particular’: the universal must cease to ‘have’ a particular, and a particular must cease to ‘have’ a universal—instead, each should *be* its other (E §164, R). In other words, we should be able to give an account of the particular and of the universal as moments of an absolute subjectivity. Doing so will involve us in the thorny discussion of Hegelian contradiction. So much for the general aim of the Doctrine of Essence. Let us now turn to a detailed look at its argument.





## Chapter Two

# The Critique of Subjective Idealism

The transcendental idealist must have the courage, therefore, to assert the strongest idealism that was ever professed, and not be afraid of the objection of speculative egoism

Jacobi, *David Hume*

### 1. THE 'STRONGEST IDEALISM'

Although Hegel thinks that a monolithic, immediate essence is an indefensible idea, he does not simply integrate mediation in the latter's definition: the Doctrine of Being articulates different shapes of putatively relationless immediacy, and then goes on to exhibit that each of these forms always already contained an inward, internal mediation. In the Doctrine of Essence, the constitutive role of mediation becomes finally categorized. But what type of mediation is constitutive of immediacy? That this is a genuine problem emerges from the fact that there are several ways to go wrong in the laying bare of this mediating structure. For instance, Hegel observes that if essence is construed as the ontological 'common denominator' of a manifold of immediate entities, I understand reflection as the mere pulling-out of common predicative marks and their consolidation in an abstract universality that is grounded upon (instead of grounding) the manifold it was supposed to explain—essence here lacks explanatory power ("in this way, essence is not in and for itself," L II, 4). This deficient construal of essence is also guilty of reiterating the structure it was supposed to illuminate: the universal is a particular standing over against other particulars. An alternative solution consists in reducing particulars to an essential positing process. In this case, essence is not a *res*, but a process in which determinate being as such is introduced and suppressed through a 'double-negation.'

Fichte's '94 *Wissenschaftslehre* represent the most uncompromising development of the idea of the reduction of determinate being to spontaneity, the 'strongest idealism' prophetically announced by Jacobi in 1787 with his *David Hume*.

However, if Fichte's basic insight is correct, the way he deploys it is still too unsophisticated to save the phenomenon of determinate presence. Constitution through the other as a pattern of double negation, i.e. the positing of an other (the first negation being equivalent to an alterity-relation<sup>1</sup>) plus its denial (the second negation), is too primitive a model of essence to truly conceptually accommodate difference, which is degraded into a *me on*, a determinate presence that is a *Schein*, an illusion. That is, since this positing dynamic is exclusively a self-positing process, there is no genuine position of otherness, and hence none of the genuine contrastive work required for the constitution of determinacy as such. Hegel is thinking of Fichte's Ego: it is one pole of the I/Not-I opposition, and it can only make sense of itself as a subject within that horizon. On the other hand, the Not-I is itself a subjective posit, and thus a fictive other that is set up for the mere purpose of providing the contrastive foil necessary for the determinate self-consciousness of the I itself. Fichte himself does not hesitate to say that objectivity as such is "only produced by the imagination" (SK 202), and is thus an illusion (*Tauschung*, WL 227). The double negation of the Absolute Ego reveals that if objectivity is a fiction, then also subjectivity—constituted as it is against an illusory prop—is fictive, every bit a *Schein* as the Not-I. In sum, the positing process does not posit a mind and a world, positing instead only itself: this is what Hegel means when he says that "absolute essence in this internal simplicity has no determinate being (kein *Dasein*)" (L II, 4).

Hegel's reading of Fichte is not necessarily charitable, and is filtered through Jacobi's reading of the *Wissenschaftslehre*. A passage from the famous Open Letter to Fichte makes clear the Jacobian influence on this section of the doctrine of essence

In a mischievous moment last winter in Hamburg, I conveyed the result of Fichtean idealism into an image. I chose a knitted stocking. In order to form an idea other than the usual empirical one of the origin and composition of a knitted stocking, one need only untie the end of the fabric and allow it to unravel on this thread of the identity of this object-subject [ . . . ] Let me give this, my stocking, stripes, flowers, sun, moon, and stars, all possible figures, and perceive how this is nothing but a product of this productive power of the imagination of the fingers suspended between the Ego of the thread and the Non-Ego of the

strands. All these figures, together with the stocking essence, viewed from the standpoint of truth, are the single naked thread. Nothing has flowed into it neither out of the strands nor out of the fingers. It is solely and purely that Everything, and there is in that Everything Nothing outside of it. It is completely, solely—with its movements of reflection on the strands which he has continuously held on to and thereby become this specific individual

*Open Letter to Fichte*, loc cit. 128).

This is a testimony to Jacobi's striking command of metaphor, and an illuminating clue to the Hegelian argument in the often forbidding initial sections of *Essence*. When Hegel says that Essence is intro-reflected (*Reflexion in ihm selbst*, L II, 7), he means exactly Jacobi's point: since the positing activity gives rise to an illusory other, it gives rise only to itself qua positing movement, in the same way that the strand weaving itself in complex permutations generates the decorations, which are nothing but "the single naked thread."

This is not the place to discuss whether or not this is a charitable reading of Fichte, since the point is to pursue rather another Hegelian claim: that a full blown subjective idealism taking its bearings from a differenceless self is internally inconsistent. In other words, Fichte's ego cannot assert itself as pure identity, since an inspection of the  $I=I$  scheme reveals a two-placed configuration betraying already some differentiation: "essence is infinite being-for-self only to the extent that it is unity with itself in this its difference from itself" (L II, 5). Fichte denies this, and instead traces back difference to a second, inexplicable act of the I, whereby a Not-I is posited (SK 102–105). Hegel's rejoinder is an immanent one: he tries to show in the first third of *Essence* that pure identity turns out to exhibit an internal, equiprimordial differentiation: essence's "movement consists in this, to posit the negation inside itself [i.e. inside essence], and thus to give itself determinate being" (L II, 5).

Again, Hegel's aim in all this is to thematize the ground of thinking as such, provided we understand thinking to consist in a unity of universality and particularity. The meaning of the particular has to be part and parcel of the meaning of the universal, and not simply an external linking of meanings, such that then we are left with the problem of explaining the ground of that correlation. Thus, essence positing negation "inside itself" is a first crucial step toward the integration of the meaning of particularity into that of universality. Although Fichte rightly sees that the only way to solve the problem is through a genetic account that strives to deduce the particular (the

object) from the universal (the  $I=I$  continuity of the self), his actual procedure makes the phenomenon of particularity unintelligible, since it collapses the object into the pure activity of the Ego. Fichte's 'genetic' premise correctly attacks the 'Myth of the given' by construing the object as a double negation: the other of the self that is not the other—unfortunately, his model of double negation simply suppresses alterity, instead of integrating it within the self-identity of the self.

Hegel's pointer to the correct way to begin thinking the issue is through the *via negativa* of an utterly deficient model of double negation: that of 'the essential and the inessential.' This is the crudest way to conceive of an essence, since it rests on an arbitrary designation of something as inessential, and of something else as essential (L II, 8). That is, this conceptual pair glosses over what, in the formal structure of these two dimensions, may entitle us to parse them out in that way. If I say that the atom is the essential part of a solid body, while the latter's secondary qualities are inessential, I have not rendered thematic that whereby this may indeed be the case: what allows the former to be a necessary condition of the latter, while the reverse does not hold. That is, any talk of essence has to thematize how the inessential's modes of being must be indeed traced back to something primary; in Hegelese, we have not thematized the posited nature of the inessential. This entails that the mistake here lies in describing essence with the unsophisticated tools of the Doctrine of Being: essential and inessential are two aspects standing over against each other like two categories of the *Seinslogik*, i.e. without their constitutive relationality being part of their concept (Henrich 1978, 263). Each is only a simple negation of the other, but their necessary, mutual relation must be made explicit by a second negation, which denies their crude dichotomy. Unfortunately, at this level, essence is just "the first, or the negation [...] through which determinate being becomes only an other" (L II, 9). If we take our bearings from the correct portion of Fichte's insight, we then realize that determinate Being, understood as the monadic and self-standing negation of otherness, is no longer a categorial option: any category must rely on the position (and hence on the relation to) the contrastively defining other. This is what Hegel means by the compressed statement that "Being in its totality has returned to essence" (L II, 11). But there is still something offering itself to thought as monadic and self-standing—otherwise there would be no need to talk of an essence in the first place. Thus, we still need to account for it, but in categorial terms that do justice to the complete deconstruction of determinate presence into positing. Such is the task of the category of *Schein*, illusion.

“Das *Sein* ist *Schein*” (L II, 9), being is illusion: this pithy formulation is the conceptual rendering of immediacy within the horizon of all-exhaustive mediation. Historically, the ancient skeptics have implicitly availed themselves of this category, in their view of sensible phenomena, and so has Idealism’s notion of appearances (L II, 10). In both cases, we are dealing with something whose content and configuration is not taken as a determinate presence, but rather as something identifiable as the absence of genuine determinate presence. Kantian appearances are—in the end—simply the not-being-there of the thing-in-itself (*ibid*)—“Illusion has its determinate being [*Dasein*] in its lack of determinate being [*Nichtdasein*]” (L II, 9). In this respect, a *Schein* is autonomous: since it is the absence of a determinate being that could support it, it seems to stand on its own feet. Nevertheless, this is not the case, as can be inferred from the optical connotations of *Schein*: that of a reflected image in a mirror. Now, an image in a mirror (a *Schein*) can be thematized as one locus of absence of the mirrored object, but also as utterly dependent on that which it is not: if the object is removed, the image ceases at once to be. This means that, ostensibly, *Schein*’s independence is completely illusory. Similarly, although Kantian appearances are the other of the knowing subject, if the latter were removed, the appearances themselves would no longer be—in Hegel’s words: “outside essence, *Schein* is not” (L II, 9).

Unfortunately, this formulation suffers from an internal inconsistency. *Schein* presents itself as a manifold of content (e.g. in Kant, the qualia of color, sound, texture, etc.), which cannot be shown to be dependent on essence. One reason for this is that, if we indeed traced back these multifarious determinacies to a ground, they would at once cease to be inessential and nugatory; they would then become part and parcel of the positing process of essence, that is, they would be Being (*Sein*), not that which they are by hypothesis, i.e. a *Schein* (L II, 11). Thus, the alleged dependence of *Schein* on that which it is not, turns out to be problematic. This inconsistency has an illustrious history behind it: Leibniz’s representations cannot be meaningfully traced back to the originating monad, nor can the Fichtean *Anstoss* be mapped back onto the I’s activities (L II, 10–11). All that we can say is that these ostensibly independent contents can only exist within that which really is (the *ontos on*), but not that they owe their particular configuration to the latter. Apparently, we have relapsed into the previous dyad of essential/inessential, in that the designation of phenomena as nugatory seems to be a merely subjective posit.

Hegel’s way out of this impasse consists in arguing that, instead of trying to make *Schein* into something non-illusory, one must realize that it is not an inexplicable residue of otherness within essence, but rather the very

structure of essence itself. That is, we are dealing with such a primitive model of essence that its own intimate mode of determinate being is that of an illusory ontological independence: "Der Schein ist also das Wesen selbst" (L II, 13). Here Hegel begins his systematic attack on dualistic notions of essence: there is no insulated 'beyond' transcending the phenomena; rather, essence is the immanent organization of the phenomena themselves. It is true, however, that we cannot really talk of phenomena at this stage: to talk of phenomena, is to appeal to a distinction between that which shows itself and the other that is the locus of this showing. This distinction is not yet an option, since all otherness has been reduced, with ruthless consistency, to the mere process of positing. In sum: essence does not show itself in the *Schein*, but it immediately is this *Schein*. The irony is unmistakable: the knowing subject infects itself with the same nugatoriness it reserved for its posits. But how does Hegel carry out this collapse of essence into illusion?

One must realize that the conceptual separation between *Schein* and essence rests on a faulty understanding of the latter: namely, essence is taken as a pure immediacy, and not as a self-mediated one (L II, 13). On the other hand, once it is understood that essence and *Schein* are fully isomorphous, the (flawed) conceptual resources that authorized a distinction between the two will no longer be available (L II, 1). Contrary to much of the rationalistic tradition, essence is not a monolithic unity, but a unity achieved through a process of double negation; the ultimate point of the *Seinslogik* is that any determinacy can be consistently thought only by including in its definition the relation with its constitutive other. This inclusion of the excluded is just what Hegel means by essence as double negation, ontological independence that is at once reliance on mediation. If this is true, then a striking identity with *Schein* emerges: the latter is structured precisely as a double negation. Indeed, illusion is the immediate presence that is at once only as the lack of any immediate presence; its being-there is an immediacy that is mediated by its other, or—more precisely—by the absence of its other. In sum, illusion is itself and its other ("ein Anderes als es selbst," L II, 12) since it is an immediacy thematized as non-immediacy.

Just as *Schein* is a determinacy turning on the absence of otherness, essence constitutively relates to an other that is not there: "the other here is not being with the negation or limit, but the negation with the negation" (L II, 14)—the negation is the other, and the second negation is the absence of that same other. Less abstrusely, essence is continuous with itself, despite its positing of otherness, precisely because that otherness is no genuine otherness; the absolute Ego is continuous precisely because its posits can be fully resolved into the Ego as activity. Let us once more turn to Jacobi's striking image

I should like to hear how one would deny this stocking that with all its infinite multiplicities it is still certainly and truly only one thread; and deny that it alone is this infinite multiplicity [ . . . ] the former infinite multiplicity and manifold infinity was nothing but an empty weaving of its weaving, and the only reality was merely itself with its action out of, in and upon itself. It also wants this return, namely, liberation from the bonds of the Non-Ego adhering to it

(*Open Letter to Fichte*, loc cit. 128–129).

In sum: Fichte's Ego is this deceptive offering-itself as self-standing, i.e. it is only thanks to the empty process of setting up the finite Ego and the Non-Ego, which are then immediately made absent by thematizing their fictive nature. Fichte himself does not shy away from this conclusion, when he designates objectivity as an illusion created by the productive imagination (*SK* 202). Essence (which at this stage is merely the purified logical structure of Fichte's *Ich*) thus turns out to collapse into illusion: a being-there that is at once only as the absence of any being-there. For this reason, there is no need to appeal to *Schein* as something standing over against essence—essence itself is the embodiment of a *Schein* pattern. Essence and *Schein* stand thus for one and the same process, although they seize upon it from distinct perspectives: *Wesen* highlights the aspect of independence (pure self-relation, L II 13), while *Schein* categorizes the aspect of limitedness intrinsic to any determinate being-there (*ibid*). But again, these perspectives are intimately related: the concepts of a monad, a thing-in-itself, or an absolute Ego (the aspect of determinate being) can be coherently defined only through their constitutive suppression (as opposed to inclusion) of—respectively—representations, appearances and finite Ego/Non-Ego (the moment of self-relationality). These essences are, quite simply, essences of nothing, and as such must themselves be just nothing, least of all an essence: an essence is always an essence of something else—but here we lack the conceptual resources to talk about this 'else.' Hegel does not hesitate to collapse their nature into that of the "essenceless" (*das Wesenslose*, L II, 15): their *Sein* is just a *Schein*. Jacobi trenchantly claims that such essences are

A pure absolute emerging from and entering into, originally—from nothing, to nothing, for nothing, into nothing

(*Open Letter to Fichte*, loc. cit. 127).

Hegel borrows this image lock, stock and barrel: essence is "the movement from nothing to nothing, and thus back to itself" (L II, 14). Once we have made thematic the fact we can no longer maintain a Parmenidean silence



about essence (that is, simply say that it is), and that essence is this vacuous pattern of self-constitution via the complete deconstruction of its posits, we have discovered that essence is Reflection (L II, 13). From a Parmenidean perspective (or that of any monism), the relations of essence are simply a projection of our reflection onto a pure unity. Now that we have discovered that essence is itself the projection of illusory relations (at the risk of repetition, there is no genuine relatum at hand!) onto itself, we can say that essence is intrinsically that reflection which seemed to be merely subjective. It is the task of the next section of the Logic (L II, 13–24) to spell out more in detail the nature of *Wesen* as reflection.

Before we go on, however, we must address an important objection made by Dieter Henrich, concerning the Hegelian identification of two senses of *Schein*. First, *Schein* can refer to qualia, hallucinations, and in general to any formal monad deceptively offering itself as self-standing. Second, it can also mean the self-relationality of an essence achieved through the ‘vanishing’ of essence’s other as a mere illusion. Is Hegel justified in identifying them? Dieter Henrich (Henrich 1978, 314) claims that such identification is never proven by Hegel, but merely assumed. Fichte himself does not reduce qualia to self-consciousness (qualia are such are indeducible facta—SK 274); only the predicative, object-constituting operations that the self performs upon these qualia hinge on the foundational  $I=I$  structure of the self. In other words, the determinate thought of  $X$  (not  $X$  itself) is for Fichte not a formal monad, but the synthesis of two acts: taking  $X$  to be something involves the positions of particularity and universality. It could be objected that although the thought of  $X$  is not a formal monad (resting as it does on the Universal-Particular doubleness), the universal itself is a formal monad that the self passively apprehends. In his *Urtheilslehre*, Fichte prevents this possible objection: the predicate is itself something that is only through the contrast with an opposite—the point is made through a genetic account of the discursive universal

The subject must be related to such a concept [i.e. the predicate], so certainly it must judged upon, that is, determined. To determine means to limit. Therefore, a sphere must be there and posited, in which the subject-concept must be limited [ . . . ] One does not notice this usually, since it happens lighting-quick [ . . . ] In this sphere we seek the place of the subject-concept, i.e. ascribe this place to it (GA II, 4, 185).

For instance, ‘the bread is a carbohydrate’ entails that the predicate ‘carbohydrate’ can be available to the self only through the simultaneous position of

the opposite logical space ‘non-carbohydrate.’ Fichte claims that every judgment hinges on such a diaeresis (an *ur-theilen*) of conceptuality into two opposite spheres, and the confinement of the subject-term into one of them; the ‘lightning’-like character of diaeresis is the reason why it is lost on the judging self. Now, this is perfectly legitimate from the standpoint of intelligibility. The upshot of all of this is that the universal qua self-standing formal monad is a *Schein*. On the other hand, this does not mean that Fichte is authorized in identifying that *Schein* with the operations of transcendental diaeresis. But Henrich misses the point that Hegel’s identification of *Schein* with Ego-essence is simply the first step in an immanent critique of the erroneous Fichtean reduction of difference to pure self-identity: the untenability of this move emerges (later in the Logic) precisely in the ‘going to the ground’ of essence understood as pure self-identity.

## 2. THE THREEFOLD REFLECTION

The optical connotations of reflection bring out nicely the simultaneous presence of immediacy and mediation within essence. A ray of light reflected back onto its source achieves unity instead of the open-endedness of infinite linearity, but it can do so only via the mediation of a reflecting surface. Within essence, however, there is no dimension that can be analogous to a reflecting medium, since that would entail the presence of an other. Rather, reflection in the Logical sense is the spontaneous “curving-back” (*zurück-beugt*, L II, 24) of the relation to another back into a self-relation (in sich, *ibid*); “reflection is going-over as sublation of the going-over” (L II, 15). Here, Hegel is no doubt thinking about the Fichtean definition: “the act through which form becomes its own content and turns back upon itself, is called ‘reflection’ (WL 67). Such a pattern is at work in judgments: ‘A is B’ implies that one moves forward from A to something else, namely, to B. But this is a moving-forward that is just as much a going-back: Fichte tells us that “*Is* expresses the passage of the self from positing to reflection on what has been posited” (SK 97); to say ‘B’ is to go beyond A, but also to genuinely reach it, since B counts as one logical content of A. The point is that A by itself can be an object only through some form of mediation. For Kant as for Fichte, an item A can be for me only within a judgment; an object is at once an object of discursive experience.

But even abstracting from the judgmental form, reflection designates the most basic Logical constraint upon any object of consciousness—a constraint which is itself a judgment, but of a higher order, one making possible all other judgments. Fichte stated that

Everything to which the proposition  $A=A$  is applicable, has reality, insofar as that proposition is applicable to it. Whatever is posited in virtue of the simple positing of some thing (an item posited in the self) is the reality, or essence, of that thing (SK 100).

This is a claim about the operations of the transcendental self: in order for something to be present to it as anything—say, as  $A$ —the self must at the same time have posited its essence to be  $A$ . I can recognize something as bread only if I have simultaneously posited that the complex of its properties is to count as bread. This means that in the  $A=A$  formula, the first  $A$  stands for the essence of bread as it appears to me, while the second stands for my position of the formal pattern  $A$  as ‘bread.’ In the language of positing, the first  $A$  is the *Sein* of bread (the phenomenal presence of its essence), while the second  $A$  is its *Gesetztsein* (my own taking such properties to count as ‘bread’). Thus, hidden in the  $A=A$  tautology there is a rejection of Platonism: a formal complex cannot present itself to me as an essence *ex vi propria*, but only through the agency of a subjective stipulation. In this rejection of the Spinozistic ‘truth is the index of itself’, we see that intelligibility for Fichte is always a matter of positing reflection: the reduction (indicated by the ‘=’ sign) of the putative immediacy of an essence  $A$  to the mediating stipulation of the self. Something is to count as such and such because I posit it to be so. Hegel is alluding to this reduction when he says that “instead of being able to begin from this immediacy [i.e.  $A$ ], the latter is only as the return or as the reflection itself” (L II, 15)— $A$  really is just the reflexive act  $A=A$ . But this means that  $A$  taken as a self-standing formal monad is only an illusion, a *Schein*: “this [ $A$ ] is that immediacy that constitutes the determinateness of the *Schein*” (L II, 15).

Taking the language of reflection seriously, I can recognize something to be  $A$  only if I can institute the continuity between my consciousness of  $A$ ’s empirical instantiation and my transcendental position of essence  $A$ . My intentionality toward  $A$  has to emerge as the intentionality toward my essence-stipulation, so much that  $A$  must be fundamentally understood to be simply the latter. This is precisely what Hegel means when he says that reflection is “immediacy as a return” (L II, 16): ‘return’ stands for the fact that to grasp  $A$  as an essence standing (as a not-self) over against me, is at once to be brought back to myself as the root of  $A$ ’s metaphysical normativity ( $A$  as self).

On the other hand, it is true that reflection is unitary only as the suppression of the single  $A$ , as the going-beyond it; that is, we should ask how does the instantiation of  $A$ , as an empty *Schein* standing over against us,

come about. Positing reflection explains only the reduction of the *Schein* into the positing activity of the subject, but it does not tell us anything about the archetypal act of positing an essence. Why should just these properties count as the essential ones? This foundational act is immediate, and does not bother to test itself against particular instantiations (the *Schein*), to see if indeed the latter are explained by the posited essence. The arbitrariness of this act, which grounds the reflection  $A=A$  but is not itself ostensibly justified by an act of reflection, is what Hegel refers to when he claims that positing reflection is also presupposing

Since it [reflection] is immediacy as a return, coincidence of the negative with itself [i.e. the identity of the act intuiting  $A$  with the act positing  $A$ ], so it is just as well negation of the negative as negative [i.e. reflection also negates the thematically dependent status of  $A$ ]. It follows that it is a presupposing (*Voraussetzen*) (L II, 16).

In order for reflection to identify the intelligible structure of a piece of bread with the sense-giving operations of the self: it must also presuppose bread as a self-standing formal monad. Or, in Hegelese, to say that *Sein* (presence-forme) is *Reflexion* seems to commit us to a pre-reflective *Sein*. Thus, reflection as the process of reducing all determinate being into positing (reflection as the  $A=A$  articulation) is dependent upon itself as immediate (i.e. arbitrary) setting-up of the pre-experiential essence (reflection stating, quite simply,  $A'$ ). Of course, it can be immediately objected that this first position is not what it ostensibly seems, i.e. an irreducible first escaping all mediation. As such, a presupposition is itself one subjective projection, and thus at once reducible to the projective activity. That is, to say ' $A$  is an essence' is at once to say  $A=A$ , a *Sein* that is merely *Gesetztsein*: "as presupposing reflection, it [reflection] is at once positing" (L II, / 7); this is the standard post Kantian critique of the *Ding an sich*: it is not just set-up, but constructed via the reflective operations of the self that "takes away the determinations of being from what remains as an essence" (L II, 4); once we recognize the thing-in-itself as the *caput mortuum* of abstraction, we see it as one more product of mediation. Thus positing reflection seeks to preserve itself against any accusation of a covert Platonism.

However, since our present conception of positing is a reduction of a putative simple into pure mediation, an infinite regress begins to emerge. To emphasize the non-platonic status of essence by referring it to an act of position, is simply to shift the burden of immediacy, instead of resolving it. To justify my archetypal taking  $A$  to be an essence by pointing out that it is I

who has taken it to be so, prompts the question afresh: "why did I take *A* to be an essence?" In this respect, reflection qua presuppositionless turns out to be itself a *Schein*, since it is an arbitrary, unexplained setting-up of an essence. This systematic re-emergence of immediacy plaguing positing reflection is just what Hegel underscores: "The reflective movement is thus, in accordance with [our] inspection, to be taken as absolute recoil in itself" (L II, 17). The apparent triumph of mediation is given the lie by a recalcitrant immediacy.

This arbitrariness could be avoided by tracing back essence to the given, to see if indeed the posited essence fulfills its explanatory task. But this is not an option here, since all givenness is construed as *Schein*, and thus devoid of any guiding force whatsoever. Therefore, positing reflection is able to explain only the reduction of the determinacy into positionality, but it does not point out why we chose *this* as opposed to *that* reduction. And here we are able to draw this conclusion: the unjustified (unreflected) character of essence severs the latter from the immediacy it is supposed to explain. Consider the stance of an extreme naturalism: how are—say—the thoughts of white, of a flowery fragrance, of a musical motif to be explained by quantum physics? They may be at bottom just packets of energy, but the difference between thoughts of whiteness, fragrance and a melody remains still unaccounted for. The reflection of our staunch materialist is an illusory essence, insofar as it remains external to the phenomena it seeks to explain: reflection, "insofar as it [...] begins from the immediate as its other, [is] external reflection" (L II, 17). Thus, the truth of positing reflection is that of being external reflection.

To recapitulate: one crucial flaw of positing reflection is that it does not legitimate the statement " $A$  is  $A = A$ ." That is, positing reflection leaves us in the dark when it comes to the applicability of identity-statements. The very moment we turn *A* into a judgmental subject we must not only institute its identity  $A=A$  with the predicate, but we also recognize a side of independence in *A* itself. However, all that positing reflection ultimately allows is: *A* "is only in the reflection in itself but it is not this reflection" (L II, 21). Qualia are only thanks to energy, but we are not entitled to think of energy as the essence of qualia; this would entail a residual difference between the two, giving the lie to the monism of nuclear physics. Now, this lack of internal relation between the manifold configuration of qualia and physicalist reductionism is responsible for the paradoxical reversal of positing into external reflection. Of course, we can try to solve the problem by stating that the externality is one between an ontos on (energy) and an illusion (qualia)—and hence that it is no real externality. But it is untenable to assign to qualia

a mere *Schein*-status (a pocket of nothingness within essence itself), since we have not pointed out how their manifoldness emerges out of the negation of essence; it is by no means true that the determinate negation of 'energy' is just 'qualia'—at best, the opposite of 'energy' boils down to the vacuous idea of 'non-energy.' It thus turns out that we cannot presuppose a *Schein* (after the fashion of positing reflection, L II, 17), and that we must start instead from a pre-reflexive immediacy, a *Sein*: "thus external reflection presupposes a *Sein*" (L II, 18).<sup>2</sup>

This means that the ontological tables are turned: whereas positing reflection enjoyed primacy over its posits, external reflection is thematically dependent on a pre-reflective immediacy: qua external, "reflection contemplates itself as a merely formal procedure, receives its content and matter from the outside, and sees itself only as the movement conditioned by the latter" (L II, 20). Here, Hegel is thinking about Kant's reflective judgment (L II, 19): one starts from a givenness, and then tries to find out the relevant universal under which it can be subsumed (*ibid.*). However, this entails that there is a slippage between the immediate itself and the universal determinations imposed upon it: 'But the fact that this presupposed is a negative or a posited [i.e. an instance of the universal] does not affect the presupposed itself' (L II, 18). And indeed, Kant staunchly defended the merely regulative use of reflective judgment: it is a subjective hermeneutic device, affording no insight into the objective constitution of things. But Hegel's point is deeper: it is a judgment limited not by a philosopher's fiat, but because of its intrinsically deficient construction: the connection between the particular and its universal determinations has not been conceptually worked out. Think of Maimon's critique of Kant: in causality, for instance, the category cannot tell us why y (instead of w or z) precedes x in experience (Cassirer 92).

Yet, this is a significant step ahead from the explanatory vacuousness of positing reflection, since here (for the first time) we have some conceptual tools to fulfill the task set to us by the *Seinslogik* in its entirety: to say coherently that immediacy is essentially mediation—that  $A$  is  $A=A$ . This was not possible with the sole conceptual resources of positing reflection: when *Setzende Reflexion* posits an  $A$ , it posits an immediate that is only in this self-reflection [i.e.  $A=A$ ], but it is not this very reflection" (L II, 21). In other words, this means that the moment we try to make sense of  $A=A$  as the essence of  $A$ , the latter vanishes, and we are left only with the positing dynamic; we have collapsed determinacy into pure mediation. How did we move beyond this faceless monism? How can external reflection sustain the difference between explanans and explanandum, the mediator and the mediated?

External reflection begins from immediate being, positing reflection from nothing. External reflection, when it becomes determining, posits an other (which is essence) in the place of the sublated being; positing [reflection] does not posit its determination in the place of an other, it does not have any presupposition

(L II, 21).

To say something about something we need also to discriminate between the two dimensions, the subject from the predicate. But this is the case of external reflection: by presupposing a self-standing being ("it begins from immediate being"), it acknowledges pre-reflective being as the non-illusory other of reflection. Again, this is the case of Kant's reflective judgment, which begins with a particular, and then sets itself the task of finding the relevant universal (L II, 19). This bifurcation sets up the stage for the following claim, i.e. that nevertheless, mediation (the universal) is posited as the authentic and genuine being ("*wahrhaften Sein*," L II, 20; "*eigentliches Sein*," *ibid*) of immediacy. Furthermore, Kant does not erase an empirical given by tracing it back to its universal; rather, he locates universal determinations within it (*an dem Unmittelbaren*, L II, 18). Along the same lines, external reflection "posits an other [ $A=A$ ] (which is essence) in the place of the sublated being [ $A$ ]"—instead of brutally obliterating the immediate into the mediations of thought, we can locate the latter inside the given, and still preserve the aspect of immediacy on the surface. All these spatial terms are not to be taken in a literal sense, as if now the given turned literally into a container. Rather, it means that to presuppose a pre-reflective being in which reflection can be inscribed, is to endow the former with a required conceptual bi-dimensionality of explanans (the 'inside') and explanandum (the 'surface'). Hegel alludes to such bi-dimensionality with the rather cryptic "being inwardizes itself" (*Erinnert sich*, L II, 4). This was not an option for positing reflection, since there was no presupposed substratum in which to inscribe the essential dimension: *Setzende Reflexion* "does not posit its determination [ $A=A$ ] in the place of an other" (L II, 21).

It is important to be aware of the shortcomings of reflection, even when we realize that it is a determining, not an external reflection: that is, even if it turns out that reflection projects a non-arbitrary, constitutive determination upon an otherwise inessential entity, this model of essence is still an unsophisticated one. To show this point is the task of the discussion of determining reflection.

As a crucial clue to the nature of determining reflection, let us consider Hegel's summation of the nature of *Äussere Reflexion*. The statement

“External reflection is not external, but rather just as well immanent reflection of immediacy itself” (L II, 19) is ironic.<sup>3</sup> True, it points to an advance over Fichte’s (alleged) extreme subjectivism, and underscores the objectivity enjoyed by the Kantian given, once it has been saturated with (not erased by) transcendental reflection. But it also hints at the empty formalism of Kantian rationality, in the sense that when it comes to objective features of experience, the knowing subject finds only what it has itself projected onto the given; the ‘immanence’ of reflection is itself a projection.

But in this [in the idea of external reflection] there is also the concept of absolute Reflection; because the Universal, the Principle or Rule and Law (which reflection reaches in its determination [of the particular]) counts as the essence of that immediate from which reflection began. This is true in that this immediate counts as nugatory (ein Nichtiges), and the return [to the universal] from it, the determining of reflection, counts only as the positing of the immediate according to its authentic being (L II, 20).

This means that we can ascertain essence within the particular, but that we cannot relate it meaningfully to anything in the particular itself which overdetermines the universal rule. Anything exceeding the scope of reflection is discounted as an irrelevant (nichtiges), which in itself is “only a singularity and immediate existent” (L II, 19). Only the overlap between rule and instance is to count as the latter’s “authentic being.” The arbitrariness of this solution is evinced by Hegel’s identification of such universal as “the essential” (das Wesentliche, *ibid*): and we have already seen how it is typical of the essential to be so only by fiat (L II, 8).

Unlike the case of positing reflection, here immediacy is not suppressed as nothingness: we do recognize it as a particular: this, however, is true only to the extent that we take it as an instance of universality. Particularity per se functions as the allegedly inessential receptacle of universality. In the Kantian object of experience, only the injected categorial determinations are taken to be true, all the rest is nugatory. Here we do question the given, but accept only a fully predetermined answer. But if determining reflection finds in the immediate only that which it wants to find, we can see that we are still dealing with an essence that does not explain anything but itself (hence its intro-reflected character, in Hegelese), and that thus is not an essence—only a *Schein*, an illusory offering itself as essence.<sup>4</sup>

Let us consider the deficiency of determining reflection by spelling out more clearly its nature. Under the rubric of determining reflection, Hegel



understands a whole series of relationships: identity, difference, diversity, opposition—the so-called determinations of reflection. Each of these posits a constitutive other, keeping it however outside the definition of its own meaning. For instance, the '=' sign in the  $A=A$  structure of identity signals an otherness as the difference between two placeholders, no matter how formal. On the other hand, the sheer repetition of  $A$  on both sides of the '=' sign is a denial of the otherness asserted by the sign itself. The pattern implies a difference-relation functioning quite literally as an indifferent receptacle for  $A$ 's self-continuity, since the implicit stipulation of difference keeps standing in the face of the asserted continuity. When Hegel says that a determination of reflection "is the determined that has subjugated its transition and its pure being-positing, or that has curved its reflection in another into a self-reflection" (L II, 23), he implies that such 'curving' can only be via an insulation of the posited constitutive otherness.

But in the fact that a determination of reflection cannot really insulate the constitutive other lies the instability that will account for future categorial transitions: Hegel tells us that there are two different (yet intimately related) aspects within a determination of reflection: the being-positing (*das Gesetzsein*, L II, 23—the side of determinate being standing over against the determinate other), and the reflection in itself (*ibid*—the side of self-relation). The former stands for the aspect of ontological dependence, and the latter for that of ontological independence. And it is in the discussion of these *Reflexionsbestimmungen* that Hegel makes the highly controversial point that not only relation to other and self-relation are each the condition of the other, but that the meaning of each is part and parcel of the definition of the other: self-identity for instance will turn out to be its own opposite. Since even many sympathetic critics of Hegel (from the Left Hegelians up to contemporary scholars like Klaus Düsing) argue that the Logic does not prove, but simply assumes this point, we will need to pay particular attention to Hegel's critique of the laws of formal Logic. If Hegel is indeed at fault on this count, the main project of showing the universal as a self-particularizing structure cannot get off the ground: minimally, we must be able to show that the self-relation of thought includes in its own meaning (and not as a mere condition) the form of difference—and that thus identity is ultimately a contradiction that does not land us in nonsense, but is instead the condition of thought.

### 3. A NOTE ON PIPPIN'S INTERPRETATION OF THE THREEFOLD REFLECTION

The Logic's treatment of reflection has struck many interpreters as being absolutely central to (if not the center of) Hegel's categorial ontology. Dieter

Henrich began this trend by taking up the question of whether this section could be considered as the key to the whole Logic (Henrich 1978, 319). Although he ultimately rejects the very idea of an algorithm allowing one to mechanically decipher Hegel's text (*ibid*), he claims that if the process of determinate negation is the pattern by which new categorial content is attained by thinking through the internal inconsistencies of previous categories, then the Logic of *Reflexion* assumes a pivotal importance, since it is the place where determinate negation becomes the object of analysis (*ibid* 318–319). However, he finally recognizes that although the formal dynamic of reflection does have enough of a guiding role to prevent capriciousness in our attempts to resolve contradictions between categories, it still leaves open many alternative ways to do so (*ibid*, 321). For all its ultimate reservations, Henrich's thesis about the centrality of the Logic of reflection has stimulated other commentators, including Robert Pippin. Pippin's construal of *Reflexion* is instructive, because by pointing out its shortcomings, we can get a firmer grip of what really is at stake in the initial (and often very obscure) third of the *Logic*.

Pippin claims too much for the Logic of reflection. He is right when he says that the unity of essence and appearance may be “that single claim in the Logic most important for properly understanding everything else Hegel wants to say” (Pippin, 206), in that Hegel wants to do away with a Beyond transcending the world of human experience (*ibid*). But he is wrong when he says that “virtually all of the major issues raised by Hegel's idealism begin to receive here [i.e. in the Logic of reflection] what Hegel himself clearly regards as a final, decisive hearing” (*ibid*, 208), or— even more explicitly—that determining reflection “is, in a nutshell, Hegel's idealism” (*ibid*, 216). In a nutshell, determining reflection is taken by Pippin to be a programmatic resolution of the problem of objectivity, of how the fully spontaneous operations of thought can nevertheless manage to capture ‘what appears’ instead of being divorced from it through a blind impositionism (*ibid*, 212). If this is true, then the final issue of the *Reflexionslogik* is the resolution of the aporiai of subjective idealism, be it Kant's milder idealism (*ibid*), or the extreme Fichtean formulation (*ibid*, 209).

Unfortunately, the text does not support Pippin's thesis. Rather than delineating a solution to the impasses of subjective idealism, the Logic of reflection is a ferocious criticism of the latter, and determining reflection is the ironical exposition of a subject taking itself to be the essence of an inessential other—and thus an essence which is not an essence. Let us turn to the text

Determining reflection posits indeed self-identical posits, but which are simultaneously only determined relations. Conversely, the ground is the real mediation, because it contains reflection as sublated reflection; it is the essence returning in itself and positing itself through its non-being (L II, 66).

If it is true that Hegel wants to do away with the notion of a transcendent foundation, his commitment to the idea of an immanent foundation can only be intelligible to the extent that the founder finds itself but reflection as such, being merely a statement of an identity that thematizes differences but does not admit it in its own logos, does not give us the resources to draw a distinction between founder and founded. But to say that essence is also posited, means to say that it itself has a derived, non-archetypal dimension. This means that it can no longer be the task of the inessential other to stand for the derived dimension: reflection must come to grips not with the non-being (i.e. derived nature) of the other, but with its own non-being ("essence . . . positing itself through its own non-being"). This is precisely the case of the category of Ground: "it is the essence returning in itself and positing itself through its non-being" (L II, 66). And only here we can begin to talk, *pace* Pippin, of the second of the two terms forming the problem of objectivity: the notion of a Being as the other of reflection. Indeed, Ground posits an

Immediate [that] is the Being restored through essence: the non-being  
of reflection. through which essence mediates itself (L II, 66).

Given all of this, we cannot side with Pippin when he says that the dialectic of reflection falls short of its intended aim (Pippin 216–217), since determining reflection cannot give us the tools for ascertaining whether or not there is a match between being and thinking (*ibid*). The latter is true, but for the crucial reason that we cannot talk coherently about being within the horizon of an extreme subjective idealism—in determining reflection the non-illusory character of being is posited, to be sure, but only to the extent that it matches the thought-determinations projected upon it. In this covertly projectivist metaphysics, thought (reflection) paradigmatically construes its object as difference from the self-identity of the self; case in point, the fact that Fichte designates objectivity *überhaupt* as the Not-Ego. The wedge between the defining principle of the Ego (identity) and that of the object (difference) makes it impossible—at this stage—to conceive of objectivity as a 'match' or an identity between the two sides.

## 5. THE ATTACK ON SUBJECTIVE IDEALISM THROUGH A CRITIQUE OF FORMAL LOGIC

The ultimate philosophical issue that emerges from Hegel's fine-grained discussion of Reflection is a dilemma: on the one hand, he wants to hold on to Fichte's insight that the determinate nature of thought cannot be platonically conceived as grounded in the passive intuition of formal monads, on the other he realizes the risk of nihilism entailed by subjectivism: namely, the fact that the object is indistinguishable from the laws that are supposed to constitute it. As the analysis of the 'threefold reflection' has brought out, a thought conceived of as pure identity cannot account stably for the difference required for the determinate character of thought: if to think is to think something, differenceless identity as a sole principle erases the very determinacy it is supposed to illuminate. In a nutshell, the Hegelian insight is that there is no way to tease out difference from a monistic principle. As David Kolb observes

Hegel breaks with one of the basic traditions in Western Philosophy, the tradition that sees definiteness and sameness as arising through the limitation of some prior indefiniteness. Hegel does not derive the content of the Logic by progressive limitations on some primal fullness (Kolb 79).

Thus, the task in Hegel's dialectical reconstruction of the categories of identity, difference, opposition is to destroy the 'prior indefiniteness' of the Fichtean Absolute Ego, by showing it to be, as Jacobi suggested, a pure *Nichts*. Unlike Jacobi, though, this does not amount to an utter demise of thinking, but the exhibition of its self-identity as a mere moment of a structure that is 'always already' internally differentiated. That is, Hegel has to show that the phenomenon of 'noetic' determinacy presupposes the employment of categories stemming from a proto-form of subjectivity, i.e. a structure that (and here the Hegelian jargon is unavoidable) is identical with itself in its difference. The onus that is upon us is to see whether Hegel presupposes from the outset this subjectivity (as suggested by Klaus Düsing, 220–223), or if he instead offers some form of deduction that comes to completion only at the end of the dialectic of the 'determinations of reflection.' That is, Hegel's revisionary discussion of the basic laws of formal Logic must show that each of these principles hinges on the inclusion of otherness it purported to exclude from itself, but not in such a way that the mode of this inclusion is already from the outset that of a yet-unproven speculative subjectivity.

On the surface, the Hegelian criticism of pure identity is ostensibly aimed at the less gifted disciples of Schelling's *Identitätsphilosophie*:<sup>5</sup> to say that "a plant is a—plant" (L II, 31) is not really to give any information on the nature of the plant itself, any genuine definition will involve a manifold of further, different components whose synthesis constitutes the plant as such (*ibid*). But behind this rather uncontroversial claim (since finite, empirical entities qua determinate must of course involve difference), there is a more decisive one concerning the allegedly differenceless Fichtean and Schellingian One functioning as the ground of unity of finite entities:

There is thus in the form of the proposition, in which identity is expressed more than the simple, abstract identity; there is in it the pure movement of reflection, in which the other appear only as *Schein*, as immediately vanishing. 'A is' is a beginning which seems to confront something different, toward which the transition is made; but the different is not reached: A is—A: the diversity is only a vanishing; the movement goes back into itself. The form of the proposition [A=A] can be seen as the hidden necessity to still add the supplement of that movement to the abstract identity

(L II, 2).

In spelling out the nature of their respective first principles, Fichte and Schelling focus only on the isomorphism cutting across subject and predicate, but miss the setting-up of the bifurcation. The very moment we predicatively utter 'A is—' we posit difference within A itself, even if to deny alterity the very next moment through a tautology. The proposition does not simply establish unity between two dimensions, but it is also a partition, no matter how formal. This is true also about the other formulation of the principle of identity, known as the law of non-contradiction: "A cannot simultaneously be A and  $\neg A$ " (L II, 32).  $\neg A$  appears in the formulation of A's identity, but only as something to be excluded from A: the dynamic is still that of setting up difference as illusory—in the principle of non-contradiction,  $\neg A$  "shows itself only to disappear" (L II, 33). This tells us once more that the law of identity can suppress difference only through a preliminary position of the latter. Incidentally, the pure monist can still accept this objection, without having to jettison his metaphysics: he can simply reject the Hegelian claim that identity qua self-relation "is the same thing as essence *ueberhaupt*" (L II, 27)—in other words, the monist can claim that unity is higher than identity. Hölderlin is a significant example of the rejection of the foundational pretenses of identity, in his recognition that since identity is a

relation (albeit the most intimate one possible), it involves both division and unity, and as such is not ontologically self-standing—requiring instead an appeal to pure unity (Frank 1999, 749)

Where subject and object are united altogether and not only in part, that is, united in such a manner that no separation can be performed without violating the essence of what is to be separated, there and nowhere else can be spoken of Being proper, as is the case with intellectual intuition. Yet this Being must not be confused with identity [ . . . ] The I as the identity of self-consciousness is only possible by means of the separation of the I from the I (*Judgment and Being*, in H 37–38).

This prior, relationless *Sein* is a throwback to Jacobi's pre-predicative being, not only resisting reduction through *Reflexion*, but actually grounding the latter. One can say that Hegel accepts the challenge, and takes Hölderlin at his own word, since we have 'Being' as the very first category of the *Logic*. But is Hegelian being really a category of immediacy? When Hegel tells us that the *Logic* is the "pure presence of thought to itself," he is effectively implying that each of its categories is a determinate way in which thinking is for itself. So, even the simplest category 'Being' is for someone (i.e. the thinker), and as such already involved in some relationality. In this respect, Hegel seems to beg the question about the ground of relationality *ueberhaupt*. However, is Hölderlin's point really fatal? Hegel does not supinely accept self-mediation as a given, but rather turns it into a problem: at the most general architectonic level, the transitions of the *Logic* are always motivated by the fact that a given category fails to completely render thought's self-relation, and is overdetermined by a (categorially rendered) extracategorical residue. Whether or not the final category of the Absolute Idea manages to justify thought's self-relation without residues, Hegel's setting up of the problem at least avoids Hölderlin's impasse. Hölderlin's knew that the identity of self-consciousness (reflection as return-to-self) was in need of an explanation, but he despaired of making available to consciousness the ground of its unity—i.e. he despaired of internalizing relationless being to reflection (*On the Operations of the Poetic Spirit*, in H 72–73; Frank 1985, 66–67). The impasse is not merely epistemological, but also metaphysical: indeed, once Hölderlin posits the Absolute as relationless unity, it becomes hard to understand how the latter can have any foundational role in identity, which admittedly involves some relation; his *hen kai pan* stands for an insoluble problem, the *kai* being already an illegitimate addition to the *hen*.

Fichte comes much closer to the Hegelian idea that one must begin from relationality in a footnote added to the 1802 revised edition of the '94 *Wissenschaftslehre*

The self is a necessary identity of subject and object: a subject-object; and is so absolutely, without further mediation [ . . . ] though this proposition has not been so readily understood as one might have thought, or weighed according to its high importance (SK 99).

Unfortunately, the problem here is that this later idea of an originary unity of two dimensions in self-consciousness does not really square with the rest of the text, where it is assumed that the self-relating nature of the I is made dependent on a "check" (the *Anstoss*, SK 205) that bends inwardly an activity that would otherwise lack self-relationality (*ibid*). The *Anstoss*' existence is parasitic on the self: "its [the check's] possibility is conditional upon the self's activity: no activity of the self no check" (SK 191). Hegel observes that even if such check is internal to the I, it cannot be traced back to the activity of the I itself (L II, 11)—i.e. it cannot be traced back to the law of identity. True, Fichte would reject the mere givenness of the *Anstoss*: he adds that otherness for me is always dependent (albeit not reducible) to a free interpretive act, whereby I construe some contents of consciousness as the other (SK 105). But this synthesis of realism and idealism merely relocates the problem: how can an original, difference-less identity go 'outside of itself and posit otherness? The problem admits of no resolution, if we begin from originary pure identity.

The Hegelian strategy consists in showing that the very deficiencies of pure identity reveal it as a moment of a more sophisticated categorial articulation. The problem with the category of unalloyed identity is that it cannot sustain itself: it involves an operation of differentiation (as implied by the two-placedness of relation itself) but then seems to collapse into just this operation, because we lack the logical tools to say what it is that remains self-identical. Identity is just as well absolute difference, in the sense that it is an internal differentiation that is completely illusory, a *nichts* (L II, 33). On the other hand, this difference-stipulation fails to indicate in what the difference consists in: and this means that basically it is nothing more than an identity-stipulation. It is easy to see that this is just the same *Sein/Nichts* oscillation that opened the Doctrine of Being, this time though construed as the incapacity of a difference-establishing operation to sustain the differences it posits.

In this there is a definite criticism to Fichte: the difference between the Absolute Ego and the non-Ego is no difference at all, because it is a completely indeterminate difference:

In the absolute difference between A and  $\neg A$  it is the simple nothing that as such constitutes that difference (L II, 34).

Compare this with Fichte's own words on the difference between the Absolute Ego and the Non-Ego:

The absolute self of the first principle is not something (it has, and can have no predicate); it is simply what it is, and this can be explained no further [ . . . ] As opposed to the absolute self (though—as will be shown in due course—it can only be opposed insofar as it is presented, not as it is in itself), the not-self is absolutely nothing; as opposed to the limitable self it is a negative quantity (SK 109).

Hegel's implicit point is that Fichte's operation of setting-up the Absolute Other can never get off the ground: an other that is absolutely nothing vis-à-vis the Absolute Ego is no other at all. Hegel's further, revisionary step is to suggest that the self-contradictory position of this 'absolute nothing' was already at work in the first principle, that of the Absolute Ego: Fichte claims that the thetic structure of the absolute Ego is 'I=\_ ' that is, an 'I am,' in which nothing whatever is affirmed of the self, the place of the predicate being left empty for its possible characterization" (SK 14). This shows that the Absolute Ego is from the very outset defined as a self-contradiction, as a saying that says nothing.<sup>6</sup>

The next step is to notice that the oscillation of the Absolute Ego between identity and difference betrays the equiprimordiality of the two poles, and the fact that none of them is reducible to the other. Now, if the Absolute Ego is to be salvaged from the self-contradiction of stipulating a difference that is no difference, one strategy is that of appealing to categories allowing us to construe identity and difference stipulations as two separate operations of an Absolute Ego: it is precisely this strategy that Fichte adopts in the idea of identity 'in one respect' and difference 'in another respect,' which is at work in the third, synthetic principle of the *Wissenschaftslehre* (SK 105–10). Hegel's tortuous discussion of the categories of 'likeness' and 'unlikeness' is aimed at exposing the self-defeating nature of a construal of the Ego which allocates synthesis ( $A=A$ ) to one operation, and difference-stipulation ( $A\neq A$ ) to another.<sup>7</sup>

This is not to say that the shift to 'equality' and inequality' does not mark a progress in the argument. Indeed, we have now at our disposal a more sophisticated construal of identity and difference. The new conceptual pair of equality and inequality is usually dichotomized through an appeal to



different 'sides' or 'respects' (*ibid*). I can define this apple by saying that is unlike that one, since this one is red, and the other is green. But they are like each other qua apples. This is already a step ahead from the vacuousness of absolute identity and difference, because here mention of the determinate '*what*' allows us to concretely indicate sameness and otherness, without their immediately collapsing into each other.

However, this mutual delimitation is a clue that to seize only upon the separation of likeness and unlikeness is to miss the fact that each of them relies on the other to be what it is. How is this the case? To go back to our example, I can intelligibly insulate an area of unlikeness (color) between those two fruits only because at the same time I have made abstraction from their sameness qua apples. But this entails that the field of unlikeness is such only by not being the field of likeness, and viceversa. Hegel comments:

They are relations to each other, one is what the other is not: like is not unlike, and unlike is not like; both have essentially this relationship, and lack any meaning outside of it (L II, 40).

Let us investigate the further consequences of this claim through our example. If I say that apple *A* is unlike apple *B*, I simultaneously posit the relationship of likeness holding between them qua apples. To be sure, I posit these relationships as separated from each other: the gap between red and green is the field where the pattern 'apple' cannot reconcile difference—and conversely 'appleness' is the region where the difference between *A* and *B* is absent. But the crucial point is that, although unlikeness is ostensibly not likeness, it is a category that must posit its opposite, likeness; 'unlike in this respect' entails 'like in that respect.' Of course, we can say that, by dividing this from that respect, we have also insulated unlikeness from likeness. But this will not do, because *this* respect is defined as the absence of that which governs *that* respect: the green/red gap as an intelligible distinction between *A* and *B* turns on its being the locus where 'appleness' fails to reconcile difference. The same reasoning applies, *mutatis mutandis*, to likeness.

So far, this is not different from Fichte's 'law of reflection,' according to which I can only think what something is only by concurrently thinking what it is not. However, we find then the stronger, shocking claim that "likeness is itself and unlikeness, and unlikeness is itself and likeness" (L II, 39). That is, not only does  $A=A$  constitutively rely upon  $A \neq \neg A$  (and viceversa), but also  $A=A$  contains  $A \neq \neg A$ , in the sense that the difference from  $\neg A$  is internal to *A*'s self-identity—the upshot is that *A* is different from itself. This is the import of the claim, in the currency of negation: if we seize upon an

object *A* qua the unlike of another, *A* itself contains “no longer only self-identity, but also a negation, and therefore an intrinsic self-diversity” (L II, 40). To be sure, on the surface *A* is unlike only to its other: Hegel concedes that *A*’s determinate difference from  $\neg A$  does not seem in any way to entail the outrageous claim of a determinate difference of *A* from itself (*ibid*). But he points out that this relationship of unlikeness-to-the-other is *A*’s “own determination” (*ibid*): that is, the content of *A* lays constraints on the content of the necessary, demarcating other—*A* compels us to think  $\neg A$  as other (instead of  $\neg B$ ,  $\neg C$ , etc). It is in this sense that *A*’s determinate difference from  $\neg A$  is a determinate difference from itself, ‘an intrinsic self-diversity.’ This injection of determinate difference within self-identity is what turns the latter into opposition (L II, 41).

This is a highly controversial point, and Hegel’s less than pellucid exposition does not help. At least on the surface, the claim is that the meaning of determinate self-identity includes that of self-difference: if this construal of Hegel’s intentions is right, determinate self-identity involves a proto-form of subjectivity, in the sense of a reflexive relation that relates to the other as to itself. This is an unpromising line of argument, since it appeals to that which it is supposed to prove: namely, a ‘positive’ sense of contradiction. Düsing (223) claims that Hegel does not show the necessity of the transition from ‘diversity’ to ‘opposition.’ That is, Hegel can only show that the operations of determinate identification and determinate differentiation lean constitutively upon each other, but not that such relation is part of their respective meaning.

I do not think that Düsing is very charitable here. When Hegel claims that the truth of diversity is an internal opposition, that *A* is not only opposed to  $\neg A$ , but also opposed to itself (L II, 40), he is speaking from a ‘for us’ perspective—that is, he is anticipating a speculative core that has not yet been exhibited by the category under investigation. The category of ‘self-likeness’ turns into ‘opposition’ precisely to avoid the contradiction of incorporating into itself the meaning of ‘self-unlikeness.’ Indeed, what defines the category of opposition is its exclusive dynamic: all discontinuity is excluded from the same, and posited as an external, derivative pole. If there is one underlying thread to the discussion of the *Reflexionsbestimmungen*, it is that their dialectic hinges precisely on avoiding contradiction in all of its shapes (from mere inconsistency to ‘speculative’ contradiction). This is the case of the categories of determinate identity and difference, especially if we see them as the purified logical equivalent of Fichte’s finite Ego and Non-Ego. Fichte’s Absolute Ego cannot be saved from self-contradiction even if its syntheses and divisions can be construed as—respectively—‘likeness’ and ‘unlikeness.’ We cannot neatly situate identity-stipulation on one side (the

finite Ego), and difference-stipulation on the other (the Not-Ego): the self-identity of the finite Ego requires its determinate difference from the Not-Ego, and the stipulation of a difference between Ego and Not-Ego requires the continuity of the self who posits that very discontinuity. Fichte himself makes the point that “the transition from positing to counterpositing [i.e. the  $I \neq \neg I$  opposition] is possible only through the identity of the self” (SK 103).

The next step is to remind ourselves that in Fichte the operations of synthesis and opposition are not simply performed upon a manifold: at a higher level, they presuppose—respectively—unity and dichotomy in the self. In this sense, equality and inequality are designed to be transcendental, reflexive principles: determinate self-identity and self-difference.<sup>8</sup> It is this level that Hegel wants us to look at in order to assess the inconsistency of ‘equality’ and ‘inequality’: equality says continuity in the self, but it also says (positing as it does contrastive opposition) discontinuity. One can very well reply that there is no problem, insofar as there is identity in one respect, and discontinuity in another. Unfortunately, this attempt to limit discontinuity to the Non-Ego, and continuity to the finite Ego is self-defeating, since it yields the Absolute Ego as a discontinuity of continuity (finite Ego) and discontinuity (Non-Ego). Hegel points out that likeness and unlikeness are two moments of one and the same activity, namely that of comparing two items (L II, 41)—so that now we face the problem of how to think the unity of this activity. Thus, ‘equality’ and ‘inequality’ as identity-preserving measures turn out to produce the opposite of that which they were supposed to issue: if the aim was that of saving the absolute Ego from self-contradiction by dividing from each other the operations of synthesis and opposition, these two categories have instead shown their indivisibility.

Let me spell once more the problematic contradiction, as seen by Hegel: determinate self-identity can only be spelled out through its difference from determinate difference. This apple is itself only insofar as it is not a chair, the finite Ego is itself only insofar as it is not the Not-Ego. Is Hegel correct here? Is he already loading the dice in his favor, by implying that the content of determinate self-identity can be teased out of determinate difference? To be sure, this is not true of external objects: if I negate the infinite set of things which are not an apple, I still would not get the content apple. But it is a necessary—albeit not sufficient—condition for the intelligibility of the concept ‘apple,’ that the concept itself furnish us criteria allowing us to reject all empirical concepts with a decisively different content. And it is this necessary condition which—unproblematic at the empirical level—poses a difficulty at the transcendental level: unlike an apple, which not only admits, but requires the thinkability of external entities outside the scope of its own  $A=A$

identity, Fichte's Ego is supposed to be a completely self-standing self-identity, which is why the idea of a defining difference from another flies in the face of its pretended ontological independence.

Instead of seeking a resolution of the impasse by rejecting lock, stock and barrel oppositional modes of determination where determinate self-identity and determinate difference lean constitutively upon each other, Hegel invites us to think a category that can make intelligible that dynamic and yet not have us pay the price of a self-contradictory Absolute Ego which renounces its ontological independence the very moment it asserts it. We need a category that involves the position of a constitutive opposite but which simultaneously makes clear the derivative nature of that opposite. There is a concept that can fulfill these apparently incompatible desiderata, namely, to posit the defining other as the absence of the same. Thus, it is necessary to posit the Non-Ego as a necessary demarcation of the thought of the Ego, but we posit it simply as the absence of the Ego's defining self-identity. This means that now we construe the positing operations of the Ego as exclusions: the finite Ego acquires its determinacy by excluding the Not-Ego from the scope of the  $I=I$  pattern. Hegel defines the 'positive' and the 'negative' as exclusive relations that—at least on paper—should allow us to construe the Absolute Ego as a non-contradictory opposition (L II, 45).

Thus, the point of the transition from 'diversity' to 'opposition' is not one of analytical necessity, but rather it is a meaning-revision hinging on the necessity of non-contradiction. The category of opposition aims at capturing the operations of determinate identification and determinate differentiation, but avoiding the inconsistencies that arose by seeing those operations through the lenses of the category of 'diversity.' The contradictory doing of 'diversity' was the establishment of a derivative ontological independence: the self-identity (and thus relational autonomy) of the finite Ego derived from the concurrent establishment of a defining other (the Not-Ego). To avoid contradiction, the task is that of thematizing the derived nature of the contrastive other—and the category of 'opposition' aims at doing precisely this, by admitting the demarcating role of otherness, but simultaneously trying to cast in relief the derived nature of such otherness. How is this the case? Let us follow the text:

This likeness with itself reflected in itself, containing in itself the relation to unlikeness, is the positive. Likewise the unlikeness, which contains in itself the relation to its non-being, likeness, is the negative [ . . . ] The positive is being-positing as reflected in its self-likeness [ . . . ] the negative is being-positing qua reflected in unlikeness (L II, 43, italics added).

What does Hegel mean here? For one, likeness is a determinate self-relation: that is, it is a self-relation delimited by the field where self-relationality does not hold; I am—myself, and not ‘the apple, chair, etc.’ So, on the one hand I am just self-identity, repetition of the same, and thus independent from other. On the other, I am this particular self-identity only insofar as I am not the discontinuity I posit over against me—here I am dependent on an other. Were this other to vanish altogether, I no longer would be determinate self-identity, i.e. the identity of this (rather than that) content with itself. Yet, I am not in a relationship of logical subordination (or co-dependency) vis-à-vis this other, since this other is posited thematically as absence of the defining  $I=I$  pattern of the Ego.

So far, this simply entails that the definition of the other is fully derived from the definition of the same, not that it is internal to it. That is, the idea of an absence of the Ego's self-continuity does not infect the unalloyed self-continuity of the Ego, since this constitutive absence is posited (excluded) outside the Ego, elsewhere.

Now, Hegel wants us to think about the real sense of this ‘elsewhere,’ this ‘outside.’ The other is not present in the thought of determinate self-identity, but the difference from the other is present in that self-identity: “the positive has the relation to the other, in which it is the determinateness of the positive, in itself” (L II, 45). In this respect, presence as determinate  $I=I$  self-identity contains a moment of internal discontinuity: it is a presence which is not absence. That is why Hegel claims that the positive is the negative of itself (L II, 45): it is the absence of absence. This means that once more, the attempt to spell out identity without injecting difference into it has failed.

Let us turn to Hegel's own examples. Prior to more careful scrutiny, the positive is the aspect in which a thing is just its own nature—when we think about ‘light,’ its nature is defined explicitly as completely untouched by the other (darkness) light itself is not: the positive is “posited being that is not relation to an other” (L II, 51). To be sure, we no longer deny that the thought of light involves the appeal to darkness—after all, a positive is only such if there is an opposite, the negative. However, darkness qua negative is supposed to be “pure absence of light” (L II, 57). In this case, since the other is simply a *me on*, then light's relationship to it is not a relationship to other, precisely because the latter is not. The other is not an external limitant, but merely light's own failure to occupy completely the horizon of the thinkable.

So that this [light], in that it relates itself to it [darkness], is not supposed to relate to an other, but purely to itself, thus darkness should only disappear in front of it (L II, 57).

In a nutshell, light's relation to darkness is a relation to its own privation. Nevertheless, this is still a problem, because (qua positive) light should be just presence of itself. Sensitive to this, the ordinary understanding severs this area of non-being from the concept of 'light,' and posits it as the separate domain of 'darkness.' But Hegel would immediately seize upon the self-defeating nature of this procedure: by excluding from 'light' the latter's pocket of non-being, and positing it as the separate category of darkness, we do not succeed in removing privation from light itself. Instead, light is now explicitly thematized as the absence of darkness:

This is the contradiction, that it [the positive]—as positing of self-identity through the exclusion of the negative—makes itself into a negative of another, that is, of the other which it excludes from itself (L II, 51).

What was supposed to spell out the autonomy (*Selbständigkeit*) of the thought of self-identity turns out to involve the very reverse: the problematic co-presence of self-identity and the relation-to-other. In Hegel's striking formulation, the determination of reflection precisely as independent excludes its independence from itself (*ibid*). There is a reference to Fichte: the finite ego (self-consciousness) can assert its  $I=I$  structure only by limiting it via its position of the category of the non-ego; the very position of self-relation produces the opposite result of a relation-to-other.

A complementary (but similarly ill-fated) strategy was that of completely insulating non-identity from the reflexivity of thought, a path pursued by the negative. To define  $X$  as a negative, is to be engaged in the paradoxical task of identifying it as the absence of positive (i.e. self-standing) determinate identity; for instance, to define evil as a negative, is to endorse its classic construal as privation of the good: evil is simply the good's failure to assert itself in a given area of being. And here the paradox emerges: by removing from the good its own pocket of non-being (i.e. by positing the latter as the separate category of evil) we undercut the presuppositions of the merely privative construal of vice. That is, if 'good's' excludes from itself its own privation, then the latter's determinate character acquires logical independence: the categorially discrete status of evil makes it such that evil is *eo ipso* the opposite of the good, and not simply through a failure of the good to assert itself. Evil is in conflict with the good through its own nature—it is "that which rests on itself against the good; it is positive negativity" (L II, 57). From another angle: the utterance 'evil=privation of the good' means that evil is denied identity as continuity, i.e. it reduces evil to an absence of goodness. But here the saying is at loggerheads with the meaning: after all,

we do ascribe to evil the '=' sign, the index of continuity. By so doing, we ascribe determinate presence to evil the very moment that we deny it: evil is the presence of absence. This is what Hegel has in mind when he calls the negative "posited [i.e. explicit] contradiction" (L II, 52).

Let us remember that talk about the 'positive' and the 'negative' emerged out of our analysis of the presuppositions of determinate identity. When we speak of the latter, we speak of the 'what' of an entity; more precisely, we are instituting a bond between the entity and its 'what': e.g. this is an apple. And the nature of the bond is that of a constitutive repetition: in its engagement with the Logical pattern 'apple,' this object is continuous with itself. Now, this constitutive repetition is supposed to be the stable ontological foothold of the thing, its independent self-assertion as the thing that it is—in Hegelese, its *Selbständigkeit*. This ontological independence was put into crisis by the undeniable, defining role of otherness within the structure of self-identity: a problem that accompanied us in all of the previous 'determinations of reflection.' The determinations of reflection are designed precisely to be expressions of *Selbständigkeit*, since they aim at subordinating the necessary relation-to-other to self-identity. The *Reflexionsbestimmungen* are different ways of modulating this subordination of the relation-to-other: it can be its mere suppression (pure identity and difference), it can be its insulation (diversity), or its exclusion (positive/negative). All of these fail in their task (a coherent account of *Selbständigkeit*) as we have seen, but the failure of the positive and the negative is a path-breaking one, according to Hegel, as we will briefly see—his claim is that that an exposure of their deficiency is instrumental in finally developing a coherent account of essence.

Now, Hegel's crucial point is that the positive and the negative rely on an exclusion-dynamic that not only fails to prevent contradiction, but instead generates it. The constitutive exclusion of the opposite aimed at preserving the ontological independence of self-identity ends up instead undercutting the conditions for the intelligibility of the form 'self-identity.' Yet, this is not simply a negative contradiction whose result is a pure nothing (L II, 52) in which the opposites are simply obliterated. Here Hegel makes his celebrated (and notorious) move: he tells us that "the self-excluding reflection is also positing" (L II, 53). That is, this is a self-contradiction in which the opposites for the first time acquire a stable distinction through a thematic relation with the ground sustaining them. On this point of capital importance, Hegel is unfortunately sparing of examples. Nevertheless, an illuminating clue can be supplied, by reading the Hegelian discussion of contradiction as an abstract analysis of Fichte's discussion of the transcendental imagination (SK 185–202).

Before I do so, however, a remark is in order. Fichte's transcendental imagination is not just an example that can illuminate what would otherwise remain abstruse in Hegel's discussion. Not only would that usage seem an arbitrary choice on my part, but it would also invite the reasonable objection that an example can make a statement more intelligible, but it cannot legitimate it. Instead, I want to advance the stronger thesis that Fichte's *Einbildungskraft* is the target of Hegel's discussion. This will become plausible, I hope, by showing that the Logic's discussion of 'contradiction' and 'ground' follows the crucial structural moments at play in the Fichtean imagination. Thus, if Hegel can effectively show that Fichte's account must rely on a speculative sense of contradiction, we are forced to accept also the Logical distillation of Fichte's *Einbildungskraft*, as expressed, again, in 'contradiction' and 'ground.'

If I successfully prove this claim, it could not be objected that my involving Fichte at this point is a dodge. That is,—the objection would say—instead of coming to grips with the sweeping Hegelian claim that something is different from itself in the same respect in which it is self-identical, I switch to a discussion of another thinker. But one must keep in mind that Hegel moves at this level within a Fichtean conceptual milieu: the identity of anything is a self-identity which rests on the self-identity of transcendental imagination, and this latter self-identity, I will try to show, is indeed self-contradictory.

The activity of the imagination involves a triplicity of moments: a thesis, an antithesis, and a synthesis (SK 193)—here Fichte is redescribing the opening triad of Logical principles as moments of a transcendental activity. These moments are supposed to represent what is at play when the Ego as "the power of the imagination" (*ibid*) posits itself as pure infinity:

It determines itself by the predicate of infinitude; hence it bounds itself (the self) as substratum of infinitude: it differentiates itself from its infinite activity (both of which, as such, are one and the same) . . . this infinitely outreaching activity that it differentiates from itself must be its activity; must be attributed to itself . . . But in thus being received, the activity is determined, and so not infinite; yet it must be infinite, and so must be posited outside the self (SK 215).

If the Ego posits itself as pure infinity, it is immediately caught up in a contradiction. The self-ascription of infinity (which here cannot be understood as a conscious operation, since the imagination is what makes consciousness possible in the first place) involves necessarily the appeal to a determinate subject: the figurative symbolization of the subject is achieved by the imagination tracing a



boundary within itself, with one region representing the Ego—this is the “absolute thesis of the imagination” (*ibid*). The problem is that the infinite activity comprises not only the portion of the imagination standing for the Ego, but also the portion of imagination outside the Ego-boundary: the Ego “differentiates itself from its infinite activity.” Thus, the thesis is at once also an “antithesis of imagination” (*ibid*). This is what Hegel refers to, when he says that

‘the positive’ as the positing of self-identity through exclusion of the negative makes itself into the negative of another, of the other that it excludes from itself (L II, 51).

Fichte’s transcendental imagination is a ‘positing of self-identity through the exclusion of the negative,’ in the sense that it posits itself as all-exhaustive horizon of being, infinite activity with no otherness over against it. It also “makes itself into the negative of another”: the figurative self-ascription of infinity can only be performed by individuating the subject of infinity, i.e. by delimiting an area within the imagination itself. This delimitation contradicts the purpose for which it was performed: it unavoidably finitizes the subject that was supposed to be infinitized, and makes it into the other of the residual, infinite activity that is projected beyond the boundary.

In order to avoid this contradiction, the imagination extends the finite figuration of the self so as to include the external activity (“seeking once more to entertain it under the form of finitude,” SK 193). However, this is a self-defeating solution, since the stretching of the figuration of the self to the whole field of imagination would rob the self of its determinacy: it would deprive it of the constitutive limit that is a condition for intelligibility. The solution is an oscillation of the imagination between two poles:

Imagination is a faculty that wavers (*schwebt*) in the middle between determination and nondetermination, between finite and infinite (SK 193).

This is the third moment, the “synthesis of the imagination” (SK 193). It is in light of this moment that we have to see Hegel’s pivotal claim that “the self-excluding reflection is also positing” (L II, 53): the process whereby imagination severs (excludes) the figuration of its activity from the figuration of the subject of that activity, is followed by the endeavor to reunite the two figurations. But this ‘followed’ cannot fully satisfy Hegel, since such ‘following’ is meant in a temporal sense: self-expulsion and self-positing cannot be simultaneous, because they would “mutually destroy one another” (SK 187). Fichte would read the ‘also’ in Hegel’s “the self-excluding reflection is also

positing” as the common belonging of the two dimensions to a given time-period, in which, however, they are successive, never simultaneous (SK 188). That is, the imagination realizes their incompatibility, and creates time as the condition for their separate being (SK 194).

When Fichte claims that infinity and finitude are simultaneous only for “reason pure and simple” (SK 194) but successive for the imagination, Hegel would claim that the formal logician in Fichte is trying to avoid one unsavory truth: that the imagination, as a substratum of the operations of synthesis and division, is a self-contradictory structure. The imagination is not simply manipulating symbols of infinity and finitude, as suggested by its “touching” (SK 201) and “being repulsed” (*ibid*) by the opposites, but it is instead engaged in reflexive operations. For instance, when the imagination in the mode of contraction distinguishes itself from the totality of infinite activity, it is also operating a self-distinction, since that infinite activity is its own. That the imagination distinguishes between itself as substratum and its operations is more than half suggested by Fichte himself, when he observes that as the “power of the imagination” (SK 215) “it [the self] differentiates itself from its infinite activity (both of which, as such, are one and the same)” (*ibid*). These considerations are at work in Hegel’s critique of the customary understanding of the principle of the excluded middle:

The principle of the excluded third [ . . . ] contains that there is nothing which is neither A nor  $\neg A$ , that there is not a third which is indifferent against the contradiction. In this principle itself, however, there is the third which is indifferent against the opposition, namely A itself is present. This A is neither +A nor  $\neg A$ , and just as well both +A and  $\neg A$ . The something, which should be either +A or  $\neg A$ , is therefore related to +A just as much as to Not-A; and again insofar as it is related to A, it is not supposed to be related to Not-A, and insofar as it is related to  $\neg A$ , it is not related to A [ . . . ] this something is the unity of reflection, in which the opposition returns to as in the ground (L II, 59).

If we read ‘A’ as the imagination, as imagination’s self-ascription of infinite activity, and ‘ $\neg A$ ’ as the converse activity of denying infinity to itself, the following considerations can be made. The imagination is neither self-exclusion nor self-positing, since it is what engages in those operations. On the other hand, what emerges from those operations is the substratum, now as contracted, now as expanding, which is why ‘A is just as well +A and  $\neg A$ .’ We can no longer separate those two dimensions in time, because time itself is only a posterior representation of an atemporal contradiction within the imagination itself.

Klaus Dusing (1976, 224) remarks that Hegel is here guilty of a sleight of hand, since

The pure meaning-content of *A* does not constitute a third in respect of the affirmation or negation of *A* in a statement, and in respect of the validity of that statement. Hegel's confusion is rooted in his attempt to show through the systematic development of the 'determinations of reflection' their single ontological meaning  
(loc cit).

But this is a rather uncharitable reading of the text: once more, Hegel's analysis does not focus on a static formal monad *A*, which then is quite externally subjected to the formal logical operations of identity and difference. Instead, Hegel is operating at the level of Fichte's idealism, where the premise that the determinations of consciousness have to be traced back to the absolutely active intellect (*New Attempt at a Presentation of the Wissenschaftslehre*, IW ; p.25) leads us to reconstrue the monad *A* of classical rationalism into the subjective  $A=A$  continuity—where the first *A* stands for the Ego's stipulation of *A* as a form, and the second *A* collectively designates all the possible phenomenal instantiations of that form. The dialectic of the *Reflexionsbestimmungen* is aimed at showing that such continuity is ultimately only possible if the transcendental imagination is a substratum that is at once identical with and different from its reflective procedures.

This entails that the 'strongest idealism' must unavoidably limit its own pretensions: not only *Reflexion* is at the root of Being (i.e. the synthetic/divisive procedures are what constitutes the world and the self), but also Being is at the root of *Reflexion*: the unity of transcendental imagination is what makes possible its activity. Already from the time of the *Systemsfragment* Hegel had criticized the Fichtean procedure of turning the connection of synthesis (identity) and antithesis (difference) into a further product of reflection (Dusing, 143). And it is just this point that Hegel makes in his elucidation of 'ground' in the *Logic*: it involves a transreflexive *Sein* which is the unity of the various moments held together imperfectly by *Reflexion*

This immediacy is Being restored through essence: the non-being of reflection, through which essence [reflection] mediates itself (L II, 66).

The Hegelian category of 'ground' spells out the hidden triadicity underlying Fichte's binary *Logic*. Indeed, ground is a) "essence posited as the

non-positd against the posited" (L II, 68)—the finite Ego as the self-standing (non-positd) against the derivative (positd) Not-Ego. Furthermore, ground is b) "the grounded [ . . . ], being posited as being-positd" (*ibid*)—the Not-Ego as a fully derivative mode of the Ego (namely, the mode of the Ego's absence). Finally, ground is also c) the unity of those two moments, "essence in general, distinguished from its mediation" (L II, 69). This is the moment of the substratum, which 'ground' finally makes thematic: "only as ground does essence have a firm immediacy, i.e. it is substratum" (*ibid*).

In all fairness, Fichte did invoke the notion of an internal self-distinction, but explicitly refused to see it as the self-distinction of a substratum

The accidents, synthetically united, yield the substance; and the latter contains nothing whatever beyond the accidents; the substance, on analysis, yields the accidents, and after a complete analysis, there remains nothing at all of substance beyond the accidents. We must not think of a substratum, or of some sort of bearer of the accidents; any accident you care to choose is in every case the bearer of its own and the opposing accident, without the need of any special bearer for the purpose (SK 185, *italics added*).

The idea behind the claim that 'any accident you care to choose is in every case the bearer of itself and the opposing accident' is one which will have great fortune with Schelling and Hegel's 'inverted world' (*Bruno*, 238, note): namely, the idea that Logical determinations carry their opposite within themselves. But can Fichte allow himself such a claim, if he simultaneously argues that "we must not think of a substratum, or of some sort of bearer of the accidents"? Talk about an accident being the bearer of itself and its opposite involves the idea that the accident must function as the comprehensive substratum ('bearer') of itself and the other.

This is not to say that Fichte is completely unsympathetic to the idea of a ground of reflective operations. The whole point of Fichte's 'first series' (SK 93–195) is to deduce the "power of the imagination, which reconciles contradictions" (SK 195), and whose "task was that of uniting the opposites, Ego and Not-Ego" (*ibid*; Pareyson 156–157). Once we have reached the imagination, it turns out that identity and difference were not the fixed patterns we took them to be, but were instead reifications of the two basic oscillatory directions of *Einbildungskraft*. Fichte says that, prior to the deduction of the imagination

we could have not have undertaken all our previous inquiries without a beneficent deception on the part of the imagination, which interposed a substrate unawares between these mere opposites; we ought not to have

been able to entertain them, for they were nothing at all, and one cannot reflect about nothing (SK 200).

Hegel shows his Fichtean debt when he casts a retrospective glance at the dialectic of the determinations of reflection leading up to the deduction of 'ground':

[positive and negative] are both substrata, strictly speaking, only of the imagination; they are not yet self-relating structures [*sich auf sich selbst Beziehende*]. The pure mediation is only pure relation, without relation . . . ground conversely is the real mediation . . . it is essence that returns in itself and posits itself through its not-being (L II, 66).

This wording makes clear how the discussion of the determinations of reflection is dialectical, aimed at exposing the fact that they must be jettisoned to the extent that their identity is not thematized as simultaneous self-differentiation (the pattern of 'positing itself through its not-being').<sup>9</sup> Just as in Fichte's 'first series,' where the goal is to "collect and destroy the categorial apparatus and the cognitive functions of consciousness . . . and to demonstrate that, taken in themselves, the elements that structure consciousness' experience, the empirical intuition and the a priori concept are nothing" (Chiereghin, 196). What Fichte refuses to do, on the other hand, is to see this deduced imagination as the identity of the operations of synthesis and analysis.

Now, the idea of substratum, of an absolute *Grund A* which "is neither  $+A$  nor  $-A$ , and just as well both  $+A$  and  $-A$ " (L II, 59) has been influentially put forth by Schelling. Since the next sections of the Logic have to do with Schelling (as I will try to show), so much is implied by the sequential organization of the text: if its coherence is to be preserved, the Fichtean  $I=I$  with its correlative  $I \neq \neg I$  must be reinterpreted in terms of Schelling's triadic Logic, which grounds the operations of determinate identity and difference into something else: the monistic 'point of indifference' that sustains determinate identity- and difference-ascriptions. Let us refer to a longish, but extremely illuminating passage from Schelling:

. . . In no judgement whatsoever, not even in the merely tautological, is it expressed that the combined (the subject and the predicate) are one and the same. Rather, there is only an identity of the being, of the link [*das Band*] (of the copula). The true meaning of every judgment, for

instance, A is B, can only be this: *that which* is A is *that which* is B, or *that which* is A and *that which is B* are one and the same. Therefore, a doubling already lies at the bottom of the simple concept: A in this judgment is not A, but “something = x, that A is.” Likewise, B is not B, but “something = x, that B is,” and not this (not A and not B for themselves) but the “x that is A” and the “x that is B” is one and the same, that is, the same x (AW 8).

One additional detail: following Fichte and Hegel, Schelling distinguishes between a derivative, empirical sense of judgment, and a primary, ontological one (SW 4, 117). In this last respect, the primary senses of *A* and *B* are respectively that of the transcendental self as the thematically self-relational, and nature as the thematically ‘objective’ (SW 4, 135)—these are Schelling’s idealistic equivalents of Spinoza’s thought and extension as attributes of Substance, since the ideal *A* and the real *B* also are ‘predicates [ . . . ] of the same,’ i.e. the Absolute. Thus, the ultimate ground of the self *A* and the object *B* is the ‘=’ in ‘*A=B*,’ i.e. their archetypal sameness in a third—such ground is conceived as ‘the Bond.’ Unlike Spinoza’s attributes, however, the coordination between ideal and real is not just an isomorphism of two infinite modal sequences (the match between the *ordo rerum* and the *ordo idearum*). Instead, just as in Fichte, each mode is ‘the bearer of itself and its opposite’:<sup>10</sup> since each mode is a mode of totality, we must in some recognizable way thematize the part as a whole. But this is possible only because each mode rests on the absolute substratum symbolized by ‘=’.

Before moving to a careful reading of the dialectic of ‘ground’—the topic of my next chapter—let us briefly recast the positive accomplishments of Schelling’s ontology. The crucial Schellingian suggestion is that both mind and world are internally opposed to their other, and yet can only be so in virtue of their being substratally identical to the other. Determinate self-identity (the subject) is internally related to difference (the world), but only because the Absolute is both of them. In terms of the two orienting metaphors, Schelling implies that *Reflexion*—the constitutive distinction of identity and difference—cannot account for the unity of its two dimensions in terms of itself (i.e. in terms of relations), but must instead involve a non-reflexive *Sein* which is the identity of the two.

In the next chapter, we will see that the Schellingian notion of a *Sein*-ground that is the ‘indifference’ of subject and object—although superior to the merely subjective Fichtean ground—is indefensible. This *Sein*—

Schelling's Bond which founds the relationships of identity and difference—refuses to admit difference within itself, is merely the 'identity,' or essence as distinguished from its mediation" (L II, 69) in Hegel's words. We will need to see why Hegel thinks such a notion, albeit superior to Fichte's dyadic, substrate-less ontology, is ultimately untenable—thus motivating the shift to 'appearance,' where essence no longer holds itself back as an absent, yet grounding, substratum.<sup>11</sup>

## Chapter Three

# Ground and its “going to the ground”: The Attack on Substratum-Metaphysics

### 1. THE CRITIQUE OF SCHELLING’S ABSOLUTE

And what he said was even more pitiful, it was an envious disparagement of Hegel, who had supplanted him. Like a shoemaker speaks of another shoemaker who has stolen leather from him and made shoes: so I heard Mr. Schelling, as I once met him by chance, speak about Hegel who “had taken his ideas.” And “the ideas which he has taken are my ideas,” and again “my ideas” was the constant refrain of that poor man . . . Nothing is more laughable than the proclaimed property-right on ideas. To be sure, Hegel has utilized many Schellingian ideas for his philosophy, but Mr. Schelling did not know what to do with these ideas.

Henrich Heine, *History of the Romantic School*.

Our engagement with Schelling in the next pages will aim at making Hegel’s often forbidding discussion of “ground” less abstract, by bringing to light an underlying critique of his former friend. Hegel himself could have made matters easier by giving us the historical referent of his critique, a favor which the *Logic* pays to many figures, even to relatively minor ones such as Jacobi—with Schelling’s notable exception. Schelling’s complaint was partly justified: if Hegel made better shoes out of someone else’s leather, he should have at least mentioned whose leather he was putting to better use. There is some malice in his not even taking the trouble to do so, as if mentioning the target would be to pay it an undeserved honor.<sup>1</sup>

With Schelling’s view of the Absolute as indifference of the subjective and the objective, we have finally cast in relief all of the moments of essence: i.e. its



structure cannot be exhausted by the reflective procedures of the transcendental imagination, which separates the subject-object identity (the movement of imaginative expansion) from the subject-object difference (imagination's contraction to the subjective pole), but must instead be grounded in a third moment, the absolute (the imagination itself as the unity of the reflective procedures). Since this necessarily triadic structure is now the object of explicit categorization, Hegel can claim that 'ground' is essence finally thematized as totality (E §121). In the *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, Hegel praises Schelling for having seized upon the problem of the unity of opposed moments (LHP III, 528).

In "form and essence," Hegel engages critically with the results of Schelling's identity-metaphysics (Rohs 112-ff). In order to understand the Hegelian point, let us briefly summarize some key notions in Schelling. Given the basal identity of subjective and objective, even those manifestations which Fichte considered to be fully subjective (knowing, acting ethically) are instead marked by a "preponderance" (*Übergewicht*, SW 4, 123) of self-relationality over the inertia of that which merely is, i.e. the objective. This moment of thematic difference is only one aspect of the finite mode, and by no means the primary one. The most genuine dimension of the subjective mode is its inner indifference with the objective: thus, although (say) sensation is the dominance of the subjective pole, at bottom the act of sensing is one with the sensed—since both are ways of being of one and the same Absolute. In other words, the sensing just is the sensed, but present as a higher level of spontaneous activity. Any spiritual manifestation of the absolute as a complex of the dimensions of identity and difference is construed (in Schelling's notation) as  $A=B^A$  (SW 4, 137), where the '=' sign denotes the ground of the identity and the difference of thought and extension, and the exponent '<sup>A</sup>' denotes a dominance of the subjective pole. In objective modes such as matter, magnetism and organisms, we'd have the form  $A=B^B$  (*ibid.*), where '<sup>B</sup>' denotes the preponderance of the objective.

However, this dominance is merely "quantitative" (SW 4, 137), in the sense that it implies no difference in kind between subject and object. This non-specific difference is designated as "form," by which Schelling means *differentia formalis* (*sic*, SW 4, 127): an infinite series of differences which accompany, but do not touch the essence of the substratum, in the same way in which any particular triangle is "quantitative difference" of the idea of a Triangle which in itself is neither equiangular nor non-equiangular, neither equilateral nor non-equilateral (*ibid.*). The idea of the Triangle is a metaphor for 'essence,' by which Schelling means the ground, the quantitative indifference of identity and difference (SW 4, 118). The essence/form dichotomy is

present also at the level of the Absolute, which is fundamentally a relationless substratum (essence) to which however the *form* of self-knowledge attaches necessarily (ibid. 121). Schelling stresses the distinction between the two: what pertains to the form of the absolute ground does not belong to the latter's essence (ibid. 120–121)—the point is that self-knowledge is not constitutive of the deep nature of the absolute. Schelling summarizes pithily these considerations in his *Presentation of my System* (1801):

It is the same and absolute identity which is posited as subject and object, according to the *form* of being, but not according to *essence* (SW 4, 123, italics added).

Hegel cannot rest content with this stipulation. The very fact that the absolute identity *A* (essence) is the opposite of the self-knowing *A=A* absolute (form) entails that *A* must itself be relational (Rohs 143). Hegel takes up this point in the 'form/essence' section, which begins with the Schellingian assumption that

The formal determinations of essence are [...] the determinations of reflection: [...] identity and difference, the latter in part as determinate difference, part as opposition. Furthermore even the ground-relationship belongs to it [i.e. to form]. Conversely the identity of [...] ground and grounded—which the ground has in itself—is One reflection, which constitutes essence as simple basis (*einfache Grundlage*) (L II, 70).

Let's recall that for Schelling each determinate thing has two aspects. The first one is that whereby we see the thing *sub specie aeternitatis*, the perspective of Absolute Identity as "essence." This essence is the simple basis on which the determinacy of the thing as such rests upon, determinacy as the *formal* relationships of "quantitative difference" (SW 4, 123) between the active-subjective and the passive-objective sides. The articulation of form ceases altogether once we see the thing under the aspect of the formlessness of essence—and quite coherently, Schelling remarks that once we do this, thinghood ceases to be (SW 4, 133). On the other hand, since this absolute basis is *different* from 'form' (the subject/object structure), Hegel remarks, *pace* Schelling, that the very moment "the basis [Absolute identity] differentiates itself from the form, it however at once becomes ground and moment of the form" (L II, 70). That is, since essence is always already that which functions as the condition for the possibility of form (absolute self-knowledge and the manifold world of things), then

essence must in some yet to be specified sense be itself reflexive, thematically related to that of which it is a condition.

In the attempt to make Schelling's position more consistent, two contradictory requirements have emerged: the recognition that essence must be relational, but also the desideratum of an unalloyed identity, a *Dass*—to quote the later, so-called positive stage of Schelling. This twofold desideratum is fulfilled by the concept of matter: it is pure identity (matter *per se* has no differences) yet it can function effectively, and without loss of its primordial self-continuity, as the “holder” enabling the synthetic activity of form. This entire train of thought is behind the Hegelian claim that “form is related to its being-sublated, to another, which is not form, but *in which* form itself is” (L II, 70), “in which” refers to a substratum functioning as the indispensable receptacle where the finite thing does not simply find but also actively *posits* the unity of its various moments. The cohesiveness of any discrete phenomenon (which *qua* determinate is under the aegis of ‘form’) has to be explained as *a deed* of the form constituting the phenomenon itself, just as much as a manifestation of a primordial *Dass*.

Now, my suggestion is that in “form and essence” Hegel is attacking only the Schelling of the 1801 *Exposition of my System of Philosophy*,<sup>2</sup> where the systematic separation of those two dimensions is paramount. Hegel recognized that Schelling made a significant improvement with the 1802 *Further Expositions of my System* (LHP III, 536), which are even today considered to be superior to anything else Schelling had previously written on the topic of an *Identitätsphilosophie* (Frank 1985, 112). In particular, Hegel observes that in the 1802 essay

Schelling chose other forms; for, by reason of incompletely developed form and lack of dialectic, he previously had recourse to various forms one after another, because he found none of them sufficient. Instead of the equilibrium of subjectivity and objectivity, he now speaks of the identity of essence and form, of universal and particular, of finite and infinite, of positive and negative [...] this unity of essence and form is thus, according to Schelling, the Absolute; or if we regard reality as the universal, and form as the particular, the Absolute is the absolute unity of universal and particular, or of Being and knowledge

(LHP III, 536–537).<sup>3</sup>

Thus, the treatment of ‘form and essence’ in the *Logic*—insofar as it attacks the idea of a separateness of the two—is aimed at the pre-1802 Schelling. It is my contention that the section ‘form and matter’ is meant to be an analysis and

criticism of the more dialectical position articulated by Schelling in 1802. In doing so, I consciously face two difficulties: the first one is that there is a long tradition in Hegel-scholarship claiming that an engagement with Aristotle's metaphysics virtually leaps out of the pages of *Form and Materie*—I myself recognize that here Hegel's heavy borrowings from the Stagirite are undeniable.<sup>4</sup> The second difficulty is that while Schelling does use 'matter' as a revision of the non-dialectical 'essence' of the 1801 *Exposition*, he is still committed in the end to a differenceless absolute. Let me begin with the first difficulty.

I want to claim that although Hegel's treatment of form and matter is undoubtedly deeply Aristotelian, it also functions as a critical redescription of the form/matter dialectic in Schelling's post-1801 Identity-philosophy. What I find interesting is that some specific objections Hegel ultimately levels at Aristotle's understanding of form and matter in the realms of sensible substance and of *technē*, can also be read as very trenchant critiques of Schelling. For instance, Hegel observes that in Aristotle's treatment of sensible substance, form and matter are not presented "in their return in themselves" (W 19, 157): that is, the modality of their unity is not an object of sufficient investigation. Thus, matter qua dead substrate is the basis on which change occurs (ibid. 156), and even if matter contains implicitly the form, matter itself is indifferent as to whether or not this potency is actualized (ibid. 157)—that is, Aristotle fails to bring out the logical connection between the *ti* to be sublated and the *eis ti* to be posited ("he produces these determinations, without showing one out of the other," ibid.). In the case of technical production, the content (*energeia* as the unity of active understanding and the *eidos* to be realized, ibid.) transferred from the soul of the *technites* into matter remains the same (ibid. 158), and likewise matter qua passive universality suffers no change. Matter is simply the third that mediates the otherwise immediate unity of moving *arche* and final *aitia* in the soul of the craftsman, but it is external to, and completely different from (*ganz verschieden*) the actively informing content (ibid.).<sup>5</sup>

By way of anticipation, these two objections go to the heart of Schelling's ontology: matter for him is an image of absolute identity, which supports the differentiations of form constituting the Schellingian *scala naturae* in its various 'powers,' but which remains indifferent to the negativity it sustains. Furthermore, Schelling's idea of Nature as an *Einbildung*, a symbolic, progressive imaging of the content of absolute identity onto matter is a strongly 'artistic' one: it presupposes that the absolute content is projected onto the matter, but just as matter, it does not suffer a qualitative alteration

in the process—Schelling does not like the idea of a self-affecting absolute, just as much as the idea in the *technites* is not self-affecting.

Let me deal now with the second difficulty. As far as Schelling's post-1801 'hyletic' revision of essence is concerned, he does not unqualifiedly substitute 'essence' with 'matter.' To be sure, 'essence' in 1802–1804 is no longer the Absolute prior to 'form'—the absolute instead is the identity of form and essence:

Before, it is true, we presupposed the equal absoluteness of both essence and form: but what allowed us to presuppose it? . . . [the ground of this presupposition is that] form is not absolute in itself, but only insofar as essence *is constructed into it (hineingebildet)* or . . . insofar as such form is unity of finite and infinite. In the same way . . . essence (or the universal) is only absolute, insofar the form is *in* it, namely insofar as in essence's respect being and thinking are one. In what respect thus are in general form and essence in a relation of indifference? Simply because in equal manner essence is configured [gebildet] *into* it, and the form *in* essence  
(SW, 4, 415, italics added).

Although essence *überhaupt* is not to be construed as matter—Schelling does not like the idea of a passive side within the Absolute<sup>6</sup>—when it comes to the spatiotemporal horizon of finite things, this archetypal unity of identity-essence and form-difference presents a derivative image of itself in the shape of a form-matter dialectic:

In this power [i.e. Nature] the complete in-formation (*Einbildung*) of essence in form . . . in particular [entities] is only possible through the totality of a *material* conformation (*materiellen Gestaltung*) in Space, the construction of a world (*Weltbau*)

(SW 4, 420; italics added).

Given that form attains reality only through essence, and given that essence is in-formed (*eingebildet*) in form, but form is not in-formed in essence in the same way, it follows that essence can present itself (*sich darstellen*) only as possibility or ground (*Grund*) of reality, but not as indifference of possibility and reality. But what behaves in such a way, i.e. as essence, insofar as it is ground of reality (insofar as it is configured in form but not the reverse), is *what presents itself as Nature*

(SW 4, 416).

This form/matter dialectic, as I said, is a derivative image of the form/essence interpenetration that takes place in the One. This is borne out by Schelling's notion of *Einbildung* as the key concept in the dynamic between *Form* and *Materie*—*Einbildung* is imagination in philosophical German, but here it has the further connotation of the artist's faculty of imagination (*Einbildungskraft*). In his theory of art, Schelling claimed that the artistic creation of the genius was at once the exercise of the highest spontaneity, and yet the phenomenon of the unconscious instinct of the genius exposed him also as the mouthpiece of Nature, expressing herself through his actions (SW 3, 619). Imagination, in its highest form, presents us with the closest spatiotemporal expression of the Absolute as indifference of subjective and objective. But at the same time, each artistic masterpiece is only *symbolic*: the fact that no interpretation can exhaust it is supposed to make us think of the archetypally inexhaustible, the Absolute as original Beauty (SW 6, 574; Frank 1995, 102).

On the basis of this, *Einbildung* as the primary modality of matter's progressive taking-up of form is that the construction of a natural world should not be taken as the injection of difference within the Absolute, nor should it be taken as the injection of difference within matter itself. Since "all matter is in itself One" (SW 6, 298) and all difference rests merely upon the *formal* preponderance of the subjective over the objective, or viceversa (*ibid.*), the purpose of the artist cannot be that of qualitatively altering matter. Instead, the purpose must be that of endowing matter with the most revealing form, a form that best tells the story of a subject-object indifference which constitutes matter, but which matter by itself cannot reveal. Thus, the position of a particular phenomenon within the totality of Natural powers depends on its respective capacity to symbolically tell the truth about the matter it informs.

More concretely, what is the nature of this matter substratally running through the sequence of potencies? Its constitutive amorphousness is not the result of an operation of abstraction that leaves us with an utterly indeterminate prime matter. Instead, Hegel observes, "form reduces itself through itself . . . to this simple identity" which we call matter (L II, 72). This is an allusion to Schelling's position: matter is the illusory image (*Scheinbild*, SW 6, 229) of the absolute, in the sense that it is a reduction of the *thetic* form of absolute identity to the *synthetic* form of the indifference of the forces of contraction and expansion (*ibid.* 228). While unity is coprimordial with the Absolute, when that unity is "irradiated" (*strahlt, ibid.*) on finite things, the latter (due to a constitutive *impotentia recipiendi Deum; sic, ibid*) reflect back that *unity* as matter, whose unity—qua synthetic form (unity of expansion

and contraction)—is only a result. The crucial difference, however, is that the reduction of thetic to synthetic form is construed by Schelling along emanationistic guidelines, such that the debasement of the former into the latter is only the production of an imperfect image (*Scheinbild*, SW 6, 229), not the corruption of the original.<sup>7</sup>

This corruption is also evinced through a Platonic sun-metaphor (SW 6, 229–230): the original, Absolute identity of matter and form is comparable to the “light of the divine substance” (ibid. 230) the “solar disc . . . which alone is what is truly visible” (ibid.). Conversely, natural, tri-dimensional matter is comparable to the refracted, multicolored light generated by a prism when it is struck by sunlight (ibid.)—the prism here stands for the inessential horizon of particularity (*Besonderheit*, ibid.). Thus, we could say that the *Aussereinandersein* of the colors of the spectrum is an analogue of a similar pattern in extended matter. Implicitly, however, the truth about natural matter is the original, simple radiance: i.e. the fact that it is fundamentally one with the Absolute, that it is indifference of subject and object.

Thus, we can say that the original imperfection of natural matter stems from the interaction of the original light-unity with the inexplicable but co-primordial form of particularity. In this respect, form obfuscates the original simplicity of primordial matter with the *Aussereinandersein* of extension—particular form is responsible for the concealed way in which matter is indifference. However, Schelling's idea is that form can simultaneously reveal the true essence of matter-essence, to the extent that it is in agreement with the latter.

If the form becomes particular [i.e. it becomes the form of a particular thing], it is inappropriate to essence, and it is in contradiction with it. . . . [but] all appearing things, despite being highly incomplete, strive in the particular form, as particular, to express as it were the universe (SW 4, 395).

What does such agreement consist in? The point is that the more form thematically exhibits an indifference of subject and object, the more it does justice to the hidden truth of natural matter, the more it reveals the falsity of the latter's self-externality.<sup>8</sup> However, what form tells is, once more, symbolic: the degree to which it makes transparent the fundamental identity of subject and object does not mark a corresponding ontological ascent of matter: “essence [here: matter] can present itself (*sich darstellen*) only as possibility or ground (*Grund*) of reality, but not as indifference of possibility and reality” (SW 4, 416)—extensionality is only symbolically vanquished. To be sure,

matter *is* an indifference of subject and object, but it is so prior to and independently of the agency of a thing's form. So, when Schelling tells us that the sequence of Natural powers is to be read as "essence [matter] raising itself from night to day" (SW 4, 420), this does not mean (to follow the metaphor) that matter is increasingly lit-up from within, but rather that the principle of difference becomes increasingly subtler (i.e. it is a difference which is more and more "sublated") so that the we can have an intuition of the original radiance which natural matter as such conceals. To conclude, the fact that matter "insofar as it is ground of reality . . . incorporated (*Eingebildet*) in form but not the reverse" (*ibid*) means that form, with varying degrees of fidelity, is an image of matter but not viceversa.

Having laid out the "hyletic" nature of Schelling's partial revision of his pre-1802 view of "essence," we are now more than sufficiently equipped to consider briefly Hegel's engagement with his former friend. My suggestion is that the Hegelian discussion of form and matter is a critical revisitation of the main ontological underpinnings of Schelling's mature stage of his identity-philosophy: Hegel criticizes Schelling's view that the unfolding of Nature's powers is not constitutive of the being of the Absolute. That Schelling does not consider this unfolding to be constitutive for that archetypal identity, emerges from the fact that he designates Nature as the "schematism of Reflection" (SW 4, 420): now, given the fact that for Schelling reflection is always the external introduction of differences, the implication is that the progressive unfolding of differences in the realm of Nature does *not* function as a necessary moment of the absolute itself. Hegel takes Schelling to task precisely on this count, when he remarks that "construction [in Schelling] merely consists in leading back everything determined and particular into the Absolute . . . its [the particular's] truth is really its Being in the Absolute" (LHP III, 537)—the reproach being that the Absolute in such a proceeding is merely presupposed as the indifference-point (*ibid.* 525); in other words, the Absolute itself should be also the *result* of this manifold appearance, and not simply the monolithic One.

Hegel opens the section with the claim that

Essence becomes matter, in that its reflection determines itself to relate to essence as to the formless undetermined. Matter is thus the simple identity without difference, which is essence, with the determination of being the other of form. Matter is thus the proper basis or substratum of form  
(L II, 72).



We have already seen that for the 1802 Schelling, form-difference and essence-identity could no longer be separated: qua matter, essence goes through a symbolic, progressive unification (*Einbildung*) with form—while remaining in itself differenceless. Hegel calls matter the ‘simple identity without difference’: and in Schelling, matter is the indifference of the two opposite forces of expansion (light) and contraction (gravity)<sup>9</sup>—as the

absolute identity of light and gravity, it [matter] is itself without differences: because it [matter] is only essence, only the position of those particular forms [attraction and repulsion] in their totality, it follows that there is no difference in it, but pure identity

(SW 6, 282).

Likewise, Hegel observes that matter is thematically “indifferent toward its other” (L II, 73). On the other hand, Hegel observes the presence of relations between the two poles:

Form presupposes matter, in the fact that it posits itself as sublated, and thus that it relates to this its identity as to an other. Conversely, the form is presupposed by matter, because the latter is not the simple essence, which is immediately the absolute reflection, but the same essence determined as the positive, that which is only as sublated negation (L II, 72–73).

Let us take up the first claim, that form presupposes matter. Schelling observes that form in general can be described as “duplicity in identity” (SW 6, 283): by this, he means the actively self-relating character of form, understood as ‘cohesion.’ Cohesion is “the immediate form of all differences in matter, or it is the universal form, through which the particular thing breaks its identity with other things and becomes self-identical” (SW 6, 286). Therefore, insofar as each thing sustains its discrete status in relation to other things, it does so in virtue of a self-relational structure whereby the thing is both “affirming” and “affirmed” (SW 6, 282), subject and object—the “duplicity” that Schelling identifies with form qua intrinsic principle of cohesion. On the other hand, the unifying bond of this duplicity is matter form’s task of making itself a self-causing structure can only be achieved in the third of *Materie*—Schelling points out that cohesion is the “form of ensouledness . . . the form of being-in-itself of matter” (SW 6, 287), and that the subject/object articulation of form rests on the “relative [i.e. non-thetic] identity of positive and negative [expansion and contraction] in matter” (SW 6, 283).

Hegel claimed also, as we have seen, that "form is presupposed by matter . . . because [matter] is only as sublated negation": by this, he means that matter's self-continuity rests on its *not* being in particular any of the forms it can take on.<sup>10</sup> Schelling's position is in some respects significantly different. To be sure, he claims that without a formal, affirming principle we would be left only with what the "ancients called *materia prima* [*sic*], something which *per se* has no reality whatsoever" (SW 6, 218). Instead, the true concept of matter is that of "the *eternal* matter holding all forms in itself" (SW 4, 321). However, we must pay attention to the nature of this holding: the eternal *Materie* contains the *identity* of all particular forms qua expressions of the One—"matter, insofar as it is real [i.e. not a mere ideal, Fichtean posit] and is essence, is in absolute form and identical with it" (SW 4, 406). But for Schelling, matter's self-continuity as "privation . . . the opposite of all difference" (SW 6, 297) is not mediated by its potential engagement with particular, individual forms—matter's constitutive amorphousness is "a limitation prior to any activity . . . an innate incompleteness, so to speak an inherited possession (*Erbfinde*) of matter" (SW 6, 246). If this is true, then the possible interplay between matter and a particular form is accidental to the being of matter itself. However, Hegel objects that such interplay is not "external or accidental" (L II, 72), and that neither form nor matter are self-originated, or "eternal" (*ibid.*) as Schelling instead presupposed (SW 4, 321). Matter "is not immediately the absolute reflection" (L II, 72), meaning that its amorphous indifference is predicated on the possible mediation with particular form as such.<sup>11</sup>

After articulating a dialectical link between matter and form, Hegel exposes then their mutual indifference

Form and matter are therefore determined, the one just as much as the other, not to be posited through each other, not to be ground of the other  
(L II, 73).

Let us take up these claims individually: matter is not the ground of form-difference. Matter is, as we have seen, the synthetic indifference of attractive and repulsive forces—i.e. matter is mass. Insofar as we grasp this mass *sub specie aeternitatis*, we do not see it abstracted from the absolute, but in essential connection with it—in this respect, mass is "gravity" (SW 6, 256). Schelling observes that insofar as "Nature [as the process of the material conformation, see SW 4, 420] is gravity, it does not contain any ground of difference" (SW 6, 266). If there were only gravity (again, the indifference of matter seen *in* the absolute), the particularity of things would disappear (SW

6, 267). In sum, matter cannot be the principle, the originator of formal differences, but only their substratum.

Form is not the ground of matter: Hegel says that the reason for this is that "since form posits itself only as matter, insofar as it sublates itself, it presupposes matter, and so matter is determined as groundless subsistence" (L II, 73). Hegel is claiming here that since form is the identity of different moments, this self-contradictory requirement can only be fulfilled in a third: the unity of opposites can only be an *embodied* one. But this means that form can achieve its fulfillment only through a self-alienation in a non-formal third.

On this count, Schelling says that

because of this indissoluble connection [of soul-form to body-matter]  
the affirming intuit itself immediately in the affirmed as in a particular  
world—in a *totality* [which is] for itself (SW 6, 218).

Schelling here is not talking only about organisms: he takes up the Leibnizian idea that each bit of reality is fundamentally a self-relating monad. Thus, Schelling is claiming that the soul is not a Fichtean ground of appearances which does not reveal itself in the latter. Since the soul intuit itself without residues in its body, it ceases to be its ground, in the sense of a substratum exceeding the content of the grounded—the body is in this respect groundless, because the soul has identified itself with what it grounds.

We can summarize what has emerged so far with a new categorization of the difference between form and matter, in terms of activity and passivity. Hegel observes:

Matter, as the indifferently determined, is the *passive*, while form is the *active*. The latter, as the self-relating negative and thus self-contradictory, that which dissolves itself, that which repels itself from itself and determines itself . . . matter on the contrary is posited as that which relates only to itself and is indifferent toward other. But it relates implicitly to form, since it contains the sublated negativity [i.e. it is the indifference of the two formal dimension of expansion and contraction], and is matter only through this determination . . . it contains the form sealed (*verschlossen*) inside itself, and is the absolute receptivity to the latter . . . matter must thus be formed, and the form must materialize itself (L II, 73).

A lot of these claims resonate with other elements of Schelling's discussion.<sup>12</sup> True, we observed that Schelling insists on the archetypal formlessness of

matter. But we also saw that Schelling (not necessarily consistent on this count) describes natural matter as having the *form* of the indifference between expansive and centripetal forces (SW 6, 228). It is precisely this feature that Schelling used against dead, mechanistic conceptions of matter. If we designate matter as mere mass, it is something completely passive in rest, as it is passive in motion (SW 6, 245)—it is the mere instrument of the moving principle, in respect of which matter is a *nichts* (ibid). But if we transcend this mechanistic vision of matter, and see matter as gravity, i.e. as the *synthetic* image of an original, thetic identity, then its designation as pure passivity reveals itself to be inappropriate (Bruno, 198–203). The relevant (if unhappily lyrical) Schellingian passage is worth quoting in full

Gravity contains (as the essence of things seen only objectively) also all the ideas in itself, but sunk (*versunken*) in the real, and so to speak lost in finitude. Light [i.e. the formal principle] is that which awakens the sleeping ideas. At the call of light, the ideas awaken and build themselves in matter toward the appropriate forms that correspond to their particularity, and tear themselves from nothingness (SW 6, 268).

Implicit in this passage is the idea of the very unavoidability that Hegel referred to in his necessity of a "materialization" of form and of a "formalization" of matter. It must be pointed out, though, that for the Identity-philosophy of Schelling the "formalization" of matter is not the self-fulfillment of matter: it is not matter itself that 'awakens,' but the forms that (to quote Hegel) were 'locked-up' within it.<sup>13</sup> With the proviso that a property of matter, and not matter itself, is actualized through the agency of particular form, we can follow Hegel when he claims that the discrimination between matter and form as that between the active and the passive does no longer hold unqualifiedly:

The activity of the form on matter and the being-determined of the latter through the former is rather only the sublation of the illusion (*Schein*) of Indifference and diversity

(L II, 74).

To be sure, this is an unmistakable reference to Aristotelian *energeia*, where matter is not simply the receptacle, but the very actuality of form; once matter is fully determined by form, it ceases to be its other, and viceversa. But Hegel carries out this point through a terminology and argument-construction that maps onto significant points of Schelling's exposition—although

with a final, decisive criticism, as we will soon see. To cut to the chase, Schelling distinguishes three potencies in Nature, each of which corresponds to a particular relationship of matter vis-à-vis form. In these potencies, the activity of form is explicitly (as in Hegel's treatment) identified with motion (*Bewegung*, SW 6, 269). Crucially, in the third power, the organism

Matter is the instrument of the moving principle, but in such a way that through the movement simultaneously matter itself is reproduced, thus movement is at once also its [i.e. matter's] own instrument. In this unity movement does not dissolve in matter, nor does matter dissolve in movement (SW 6, 319).

In an organism, matter is subjected to the organizing activity of a living form, but the *telos* of that living form is just as much the preservation of the matter it informs—it makes no sense here to just say that form rules over matter. Compare this with Hegel's own statement:

This, what appears as the activity of form, is furthermore just as much the movement belonging to matter itself . . . Insofar as matter is determined by form as by an outer, just in this respect matter achieves its destination (*Bestimmung*) (L II, 75).

This is not to say that the distinction between form and matter is thereby completely obliterated. If anything, it is now that it is posited most explicitly! Let us see how. In Schelling's first power, form is only an accident of matter, which means that it does not achieve a self-standing position. One example: oxygen and hydrogen are from the aspect of matter one and the same—their respective determinacies do not have the power to assert themselves as what they are, they are only accidents of a substratum, which accounts for their intrinsic instability (SW 6, 318). Or, differently put, here the motility of form is not spontaneous activity (*Thätigkeit*, SW 6, 135).

It is in the second power that form appears as movement, which strives to reassert (*zurückstrebt*, SW 6, 321) Identity, and matter appears as the passive expression of form (*ibid*). What characterizes the second power is that although dynamic form seeks to establish identity, it requires as its condition difference (SW 6, 322). Schelling sees in magnetism the paradigm of this state of affairs: each pole of a magnet flees other poles like it, seeks its opposite (i.e. difference), but only to establish a unity with it, and thus to increase itself (SW 6, 324). Here extension is not due to matter as inert indifference of expansion and contraction, as it was in the first power, but rather the

result of a self-increasing, self-constituting formal principle (*ibid.*). The converse problem attains here, as a result: matter's extensionality seems to be just the result of form, its accident. Even here, the mutual irreducibility of the two dimensions is not yet posited.

This happens only in the organism. The fact that in organic unities matter and form are each the goal and instrument of the other, and that thus neither can claim ontological primacy over the other, allows us to finally grasp as mutually irreducible. Schelling observes that

In the organism, matter is no longer for itself, there is no matter that would be as such; [there is] only matter painted (*verhmählte*) with form, matter as Idea, matter penetrated by the concept of the whole—only thus matter is something (SW 6, 383).

On the other hand, Schelling points out elsewhere that this interpenetration does not really involve matter in the genuine sense of the term. The true nature of organic unity is designated as "stuff" (*Stoff*, SW 6, 307): stuff is matter, insofar as matter *appears* to be one with its animating principle" (*ibid.*, 307–308). The organized matter and the life of that matter are to be sure in genuine unity, but the organization of matter is external to extended matter itself—Stuff is natural matter *painted* with form, Schelling observes. True to the symbolic presuppositions of *Einbildung*, the organism is the unity of form with an *image* of matter, which means that the organism is a purely formal affair, pointing to a transcendent content as the original.

I have deliberately invoked the notion of 'content.' In the *Lectures on the History of Philosophy* Hegel recognizes that while Kant's empty appearance leaves us hankering for content as the unity of subjective and subjective, Schelling has hit the nail on the head with this speculative unity of objective and subjective—this unity is called 'content', and Schelling set himself the task of fulfilling the requirement of "content" (LHP III, 478).<sup>14</sup> But in the *Logic's Form and Matter* section, praise for the notion of content is mixed with an unmistakable criticism

The reproduced unity has in its going together with itself just as much repulsed itself from itself, and determined itself. Indeed, their [i.e. of matter and form] unity is, as reached through negation, also negative unity. It is therefore unity of form and matter as their basis, but as their *determined basis*, which formed matter however is indifferent vis-à-vis form and matter as against something sublated and inessential. This unity is the content (L II, 77).

The 'going together with itself' of matter and form is their coalescing into a unity, while the 'self-repulsion' of the latter means that precisely the fact of their unity allows us to stably discriminate, for the first time, form from matter as mutually irreducible—they are one only in a *third*, which is what Hegel calls content. The problem here is that the unity of the organism or that of the masterpiece is the unity between form and another formal moment: organic matter as simulacrum of absolute matter. It is for this reason that in *Form and Content*, Hegel claims that "matter appears under the dominance of form and is again one of its moments" (L II, 77). Given all of this, Schelling claims that in explicit soul-body unity of the organism "there is a copy of the Idea . . . this image displays the indifference whereby form is also substance and substance is form" (Bruno, 202). The original Idea is the subject-object as the absolute content that Schelling unfolded, but without making thematic that this *Urbild* hinges on the dialectic of Nature and Spirit (LHP III, 545). It is thus polemically that Hegel claims that content "is indifferent vis-à-vis form and matter as against something . . . inessential" (*ibid*).

The point is that Schelling refuses to see the Absolute as self-constitution through an internal differentiation—the ultimate *Grund* is bereft of any negativity, and the unity of the spatiotemporal organism is simply an image inexplicably emerging out of the ground itself. Hegel appropriately remarks that the ground is "neither active nor productive; instead, an existence simply emerges from the ground" (E §122 R). But to think along these lines is question-begging: that of Schelling "is a mere assertion, the continual return after each differentiation, which is perpetually again removed out of the Absolute" (LHP III, 538). On the other hand, Hegel describes his own position as the recognition of the fact that Nature and Spirit not only are implicitly identical, but that they produce this one absolute identity out of themselves (LHP III, 545).

In the next sections, Hegel tries to run through all the other ways of conceiving of a ground that—like Schelling's ground—is determinate (qua unity of different moments), but which refuses to accommodate negativity within itself. This *tour de force* aims at defeating once and for all the idea of an unmediated substratum which nevertheless claims explanatory force. In other words, Hegel will be attacking Schelling's idea of a separation between ground and existence, in all of its possible permutations—as we will see, this task entails a confrontation with the metaphysical underpinnings of Newtonian science, and with the Kantian idea of the transcendence of the unconditioned. If Hegel is right, the adage "Essence must appear" (L II, 104) is not the uncritical pronouncement of a metaphysics of presence, but the upshot of the internal contradictions of a metaphysics of absence.

## 2. OTHER FORMS OF GROUND-METAPHYSICS

And if he were demanded, what is it, that that Solidity and Extension inhere in, he would not be in a much better case than the *Indian* before mentioned: who, saying that the World was supported by a great Elephant, was asked, what the Elephant rested on; to which his answer was, a great Tortoise: But being again pressed to know what gave support to the 'broad-back'd' Tortoise, replied, something, he knew not what.

*Locke, An essay concerning Human Understanding.*

At this point, Hegel's exposition moves on to a critique of the metaphysical underpinnings of the sciences of his time: the sequence formal/real/absolute ground is an exposure of a manifold failure to hold on to an unmediated center of mediation.<sup>15</sup> What is interesting is that Schelling's notion of content provides the launching pad for such discussion. In the *Bruno* (p. 202), a distinction is drawn between the archetypal and derived subject-object identity, between original and derived Idea. Thus, the organism's soul-body indifference is but a replica of a primordial one (*ibid.*). Here, the search for a ground entails that

One expects to construe in a double fashion the determination of content: once [it is construed] in the form of the posited, the other in the form of reflected being-there, [the form of the essentiality] (L II, 80).

The mind-body unity is a content (i.e. the determinate unity of the formal moments of subjectivity and objectivity) that is once taken as posited as replica (*Abbild*) and the other as reflected (i.e. self-posited *Urbild*). This means that the ground-grounded dynamic is incapable of drawing an actual distinction between the two poles, because it designates them through one and the same content. In Schelling, this is not a sign of logical naiveté, but rather the consequence of the principle that the Absolute should be completely self-continuous in the world of things. So it makes sense that the grounded spatiotemporal organism express the same content, the same S–O indifference which constitutes the grounding absolute: the idea of content allows us to think "each as the totality itself" (L II, 79).

Now, Hegel thinks that the physical sciences of his time operate on these assumptions, but in an even cruder form. Their way of providing explanations of natural phenomena hinges on an uninformative reduplication of the content, such as the one involved in stating that the ground of the planets' revolution around the sun is the mutual attractive force between the sun and its planets, or that the form of a crystallization rests on a particular



molecular arrangement (L II, 81)—this fraudulent repetition of the explanandum in the guise of the explanans contradicts the fundamental criterion that the content of the ground be different from the content of the grounded (L II, 85). Conversely, Hegel points out in the *Lectures* that the other great merit of Schelling (the first being the overcoming of merely subjective idealism) is that of insisting on an *effective* carrying out of the Galilean rape of the senses required by any genuine explanation. In yet other terms: although Schelling is guilty of operating on the assumptions of a substratum-metaphysics, his appeal to a substratum is not as coarse as that of the *Naturwissenschaften* of the day. To appeal to “molecules, empty interstices, repulsive force, ether, magnetic matter and a whole lot else like it [as if they were] things or relationships . . . actually present in perception” (L II, 84) is to resort to reified substrata which reiterate thinghood, instead of explaining it. At least in principle, Schelling tried to reinterpret “electricity, magnetism & c” (LHP III, 542) as moments of the non-reified, self-relating activity of the progressive (if symbolic) “self-subjectivization” of Nature (*ibid*). Schelling is then guilty of a reifying tautology on another, more fundamental level: although the synthesizing, thing-constituting activity is not a *res*, the condition for its possibility is the inactive Bond which in turn rests upon an equally inert, absolute *Band*. Discursive knowledge of this Bond is not possible for Schelling, so in this respect his position is analogous to the Newtonian skepsis according to which “we do not know the inner essence of these forces and matters” (L II, 84).

In sum, the sciences of the time are guilty of a fundamental contradiction: they appeal to the putatively immediate substratum of molecules, ether and other abstractions, but through a procedure which exposes their inherently mediated character: the defining structure of these *entia rationis* is copied from the structure of sensible immediacy (*aus dem Dasein die Grunde zu finden*, L II 82), so that the ground is rather the grounded (*ist hiermit der Grund Gesetztes*, L II, 80). In order to avoid the “perversity” (*Verkehrtheit*, L II, 83) of mediating the substratum, one option is that of assigning one content to the ground, and another, different content to the grounded.<sup>16</sup> It is just this option that Hegel considers in *Real Ground*, although even here he will expose another illegitimate appeal to the notion of a *hupokeimenon*.<sup>17</sup>

Consider a house: we could say that it is grounded by the foundations, which constitute the ground (L II, 87). Here, the appeal to two distinct contents prevents the tautology of an unreflective hypostasis of phenomena, but only at the cost of the injection of accidentality in the ground-grounded relationship (*ibid*). Indeed, strictly speaking, the only reason why the foundations function effectively as the ground of the house proper is only because of the

agency of gravity, a third which is common to both the foundations and the rest of the building (*ibid*). What is more, even this mediating link stands in no necessary relation to the unified terms: gravity is also what can provoke the collapse of a building, and by itself it is in no privileged relationship with another, inessential content, the manifold features of the house (*ibid*). Of course these features (roof, thermal insulation, etc) are anything but inessential given the purpose of the house, but this is precisely the sticking point: the category of ground is too impoverished to play the role of a purposive factor "containing the whole expanse of the thing (*Sache*)" (L II, 90)—the way in which a seed archetypally contains the whole. The only reason why gravity functions as the basis (*Grundlage*, *ibid*.) of a house is the house itself, as the quite external unity of a manifold content *plus* the essential content of gravity—the building is here "the One of the something . . . only an external bond (*Band*) that does not contain the manifold content as posited" (L II, 86).

To sum up: the problem here is that the substratum (gravity) can function as a ground of the other allegedly inessential contents only through appeal to a particular concrete (*Konkretum*, L II, 79) which should enable us to single out a given element as "essential," and the others as accidental. But the nature of the concrete as "external bond" (L II, 86) is so formal that it opens the door to an equally accidental selection of the "essential": the fitting example is the institution of punishment, where the election of the crucial feature (retribution, terrifying example, law's preventive sanction, etc) is a matter for infinite discussion and "sophistry" (L II 90), "because in this theory the Understanding is insufficient; the essence of the matter depends on the Concept" (*Philosophy of Right*, §71).<sup>18</sup>

The contradiction which prompts us to rethink once more the nature of "ground" is, once more, the fact that the substratum has failed to do *immediately* the job of mediation. Although Hegel does not mention him, it seems to me that there is a clear allusion to Hume's critique of causation: that *A* is taken to be the ground of *B*'s motion cannot be justified in terms of just *A* itself. This makes sense, given Hume's sensual atomism: *A* is not implicitly the whole *A–B*, so that its connection with *B* could be read as *A*'s own necessity. Instead, it is the constant *A–B* connection which then authorizes us to take *A* as the ground of its connection with *B*. It is the Kantian answer to this problem that Hegel investigates in minute detail in *Complete Ground*—although Klaus Hartmann laments that "here the examples are sadly missing" (Hartmann, 208), I agree with Beatrice Longuenesse that this section is clearly meant as part of Hegel's discussion of the Kantian synthesis of apperception (Longuenesse, 129).<sup>19</sup>

The transition from real to complete ground distills in its pure logical form the answer that Kant gives to Hume's attack on the metaphysical

underpinnings of causality, while taking for granted Hume's empirical atomism. So, on this atomistic premise, Kant agrees with Hume that thinghood is basically "the undetermined substratum of a manifold content, a connection of the content which is not the latter's own reflection, but an external and thus merely posited one" (L II, 91). That is, the associations of the imagination are not intrinsic to the relata themselves. Unlike Hume however, reproductive imagination is not the end of the story for Kant: Hume had failed to realize that such associative unity cannot be just the *post factum* inference from repeated experiences of the same sort, since unity itself cannot be read off an ensemble of atomic sense-units. And yet such unity is required, since the association of a manifold is an object *for me* only if I can at the same time think the unity of the connected representations (CPR, B 138). Now, since by hypothesis the representations *are per se* relationless, it follows that the required unity can only be "the formal unity of consciousness in the synthesis of the manifold of representations" (CPR, A 105). Thus, while the content of the associations through which an object arises for me is a matter of contingency, the form of association rests on transcendental apperception, the "*ground* of the unity of consciousness in the synthesis of the manifold . . . a *ground* without which it would be impossible to think any object for our intuitions" (CPR, A 106, italics added).

Hegel reconstructs these conclusions in the following passage:

First, something has a ground; it contains the content-determination which is the ground, and a second one as posited by the first. But as indifferent content the first is not in itself ground, nor is the other *per se* the grounded of the first. Instead, this relation is in the immediacy [i.e. atomicity, NDA] of the content as sublated or posited, and as such it has its ground in *another* [something]. This second relation is different only according to form: it has the same content as the first, namely both content-determinations, but it is the *immediate* connection of those contents

(L II, 91–92).

The distinction between two somethings, one of which is the ground of the other is a clear allusion to Kant's transcendental *Grund* and its relation to the sensory manifold it organizes. The "original" (*ursprüngliche*, L II, 93) connection would then be general form of the synthesis of a pure manifold which constitutes any particular category in which two (or more) time-determinations are joined in a condition/conditioned relationship. Hegel must be thinking here of the three categories of relation, which concern "the existence

of the objects . . . in their relation to each other" (CPR B110), a temporal relation in the forms of duration, succession and coexistence (CPR B219). In this respect, a category is an original connection: that is, we cannot ask for any higher ground of the *A/B* connection—the explanation stops in the category itself as a function of unity of the transcendental self. In this sense, the first 'something' would be the pure, transcendental object yielded by the unity of the categories with pure intuition. The second 'something' is then the actual object of experience constituted in conformity with the first 'something' functioning as "a rule" (CPR B 238).

As we have seen, Hegel moves from the presupposition that both the transcendental rule of objective unity and the synthesized object share the general form of an *A–B* connection, with the only difference that the connection is original in the former, derived in the latter.<sup>20</sup> The original connection in the first 'something' (the *a priori* form of objective, synthetic unity) grounds the role of the empirical *A* as a ground of the connection with *B* (L II, 93). However, this means that the original connection does not posit in the actual object the *being* of the sense-datum *A*, but only the latter's normative force vis-à-vis another sense datum *B*; in line with Kant's emphasis on the receptive, finite side of our cognition, *A* is *found* in the object: "the determination *A* pertains only immediately to the second something" (L II, 93), since "being-there is immediate, and without a ground" (L II, 94). It is in this sense that transcendental imagination *qua* ground relies on the manifold, immediate presence of the condition (L II, 94).

It is just this feature that allows Hegel to question the substratal status of the transcendental Ego. Its unity, he observes, "may likewise be called a relation; for in so far as a manifold is presupposed, and this on the one side remains a manifold while on the other side it is set forth as one, so far may it be said to be related" (LHP III, 437–438). The point is that apperception is a unity only in relation to a manifold whose self-externality it sublates. Each mode of the I's *a priori* world-constituting relation to givenness is "only *relative* ground in relation to the connection in the other [empirical] something" (L II, 92), "ground not in and for itself, but only in relation to the sublated ground-relationship [i.e. to the constituted 'something']" (ibid. 93). Thus, while the *unity* of the pure syntheses (enshrined in the various categories) rests solely upon the Ego, the spontaneous, reflexive *identity* of the Ego can achieve itself only through rule-guided, object-constituting transitions between bits of experiential intake.<sup>21</sup> The upshot is that even apperception must fail us in our search for an immediate ground: on Hegel's reading, Kant's Ego is ground of experiential unity only by presupposing the "condition . . . which is first of all an immediate, manifold being-there" (L II, 94). The Ego is reflexively self-identical because it spontaneously catches itself in

the act of rule-guided synthesis of the manifold, but it needs the pure intuition of external data as the passive material of that activity.

On the other hand, we should not stop at such a rigid dichotomy between the ground and the condition: the manifold is not simply the passive, inessential aspect resting on a categorial substratum—as was instead the case for earlier, less sophisticated construals of *Grund*. To be sure, the transcendental ground imposes its pattern onto actual bits of experiential intake: “the understanding carries the time-order over into the appearances and their existence” (CPR B245). But this transfer is just as much a delegation of the foundational pattern to the manifold itself, since in the dynamical categories of relation, parts of the manifold take up the business of foundation, and become ground of the position in time of other parts of the manifold: “the appearances *must determine for one another* their position in time, and make the same time order a necessary order” (CPR B245). Conversely, in Schelling the ground was taken to be just an underlying foundation, “essence that constitutes itself through its non-being” (L II, 66)—i.e., through something that *was not itself ground*. It goes to Kant’s merit that he overcomes this surd by envisioning the condition as the “being-in-itself” of the Ground, i.e. as the ground in the shape of implicitness (*das Ansichsein des Grundes*, L II, 95).

But to what extent is the condition part and parcel of the ground? Hegel points out that empirical intuitions are a mixture of extracategorial qualia and of spatiotemporal determinations that become grounding moments of the object of experience

[the material] is therefore a mixture of self-standing content, that does not have any relation to the content of the ground-determination, and of such content that goes into it, and—as its material—has to become a moment of the content of the ground-determination (L II, 96).

We have seen that this manifold does a genuinely foundational work, which is why Hegel says that “it constitutes the essentiality of the ground” (L II, 97). However, this foundational work is extrinsic to the being of the manifold itself: “the immediate being-there is indifferent to its being a condition” (L II, 96). The manifold is the unconditioned vis-à-vis the ground, since its existence as a plurality of discrete immediates is not derived from the ground. Likewise, the grounding functions of categorial unity, insofar as their synthetic operations are simply the imposition of their own formal content, relate to sense-data as to “a passive, whose intrinsic form is inessential” (L II, 96)—from this angle, even the Ego is the unconditioned relative to sense-immediacy. We are thus in the presence of a contradiction

of two poles exhibiting themselves as independent despite their constitutive interrelation.

Sensitively, Hegel understands that the Kantian position can be overcome only if his atomic view of sense-data is exposed as untrue: otherwise, Kant is unassailable in his cognitive impositionism entailing an ultimate externality between synthetic form and synthesized material. In a highly compressed fashion, Hegel claims that

In itself [sensible] being-there is only this, to sublate its own immediacy and to go to the ground. *Being* is in general only the becoming to essence; it is its own essential nature, to make itself into a posited and into an identity [with the positor] . . . the formal determinations of being-posed [i.e. of being material for categorial syntheses, NDA] and of self-identical being-in-itself, the form . . . are not external to the immediate being-there, but the latter is this very reflection . . . its immediacy consists in making itself into a grounded-being, and thus to repel itself from itself in going to the ground, just as much as it consists in being ground, which makes itself into posited, grounded being—but as one with the ground (L II, 97).

Hegel is not trying to overcome Kant through a crude hylozoism in which literally the sense-datum "repels" its own punctual being and "makes itself" into the ground. Instead, the claim must be that the sense-datum is not a one-dimensional simplicity, but contains implicitly its connection with the transcendental Ego, so that the addition of categorial form simply actualizes the heretofore latent relational nature of the sense-datum. This premise rests on Spinozistic assumptions that Hegel shares with Schelling: namely, the idea that any finite item *sub specie aeternitatis* is identical with the Absolute ground, only imperfectly, in the guise of an infinite connection in time with other objects. Schelling argued that

The self's nature explains also explains why things that are intrinsically eternal end up located in objective, temporal cognition, where they are determined by time . . . since objective cognition is finite, the infinite [concept of cognitions] can only actualize the infinite possibility contained in its [object of] thought in finite manner, and what is infinitely exemplified in the infinite can be reflected only in a finite way within the finite  
(Bruno, 186–187).

The point here is that the infinite synthesis in time is required because the single bit of experience is already the unconditioned, already implicitly identical

to the absolute. Its connection with other elements in time is a result of its implicit inconditionality, it is not, as Kant would have it, the search for that inconditionality. Thus, when Hegel declares that the “immediate *Sache*” (L II, 100) is “the absolute unconditioned . . . the absolute ground which is identical with its condition” (ibid), he is deliberately diverging from the Kantian construal of the unconditioned. As is known, Kant construed the unconditioned as the regulative ideal fugue-point of the horizontal syntheses of experience, but—at the theoretical level—he emptied it of a metaphysical significance (CPR B537). Against this, Hegel construes the vertical unity between the transcendental Ego and the single bit of experiential intake as the true unconditioned. Kant would no doubt protest, claiming that the finite nature of the condition requires it to be supplemented by an infinite series of further conditions—to construe as the unconditioned the relationship between Ego and single sensible intuition is to hypostasize what is merely a regulative ideal. It was also this Kantian attitude that Jacobi famously attacked in his polemical request *dos moi pou sto* (“give me a place to stand”) opening his Spinoza-tract. For Jacobi, since we did indeed have Cartesian certainty of objects around us, this could only be due to the presence of an unconditioned within them.

There is definitely a Jacobian overtone, when Hegel asks

Why in the presence of a condition one asks for a further condition?  
Because the condition is just a finite determinate being. But this is a further determination of the condition, which does not inhere in its concept. The condition as such is a conditioned, because it is the posited being-in-itself [of the ground]; it is thus sublated in the absolute unconditioned (L II, 99).

In Kant, the necessity of connection with other bits of sensible intuition rests on the inherently deficient nature of the sense-datum. This being the case, the theoretical embarrassment of having a bit of sensible immediacy function as the ground of another, is removed by tracing such grounding force back to a previous sensible dimension, and so on. Thus, it is not the case that we never reach a sensible unconditioned because of our finitude. Instead, there cannot by hypothesis ever be one, based on Kant's own conception of sensible immediacy.

Conversely, for Hegel such necessity (that of being-conditioned) does not rest on the deficiency of the individual datum, but instead on its being implicitly the whole (“the posited being-in-itself [of the ground]”). If the Ego is that which remains itself in its other (the sense-datum on which it

confers an epistemically legislative function), then the datum must replicate the self-relating structure of the Ego by entering in relation with other data. It is Kant instead who is guilty of hypostasis, by dogmatically asserting the finitude of the condition, forgetting that this determination is not part of the essence (it "does not inhere in the concept") of the sensible condition.<sup>22</sup> Once more, the necessity of horizontal unity with other conditions is not the *search* for, but the *result* of the unconditioned, construed as the vertical unity between the Ego and the individual sense-datum. Such vertical unity entails that the unity-through-difference of the transcendental imagination is also the implicit essence of the datum subsumed under the imagination itself, involving as its *pendant* the actualization of the intrinsically relational nature of the sense-datum: that is, the actualization of an horizontal unity.

But this result is still imperfect, because it seems to entail that the vertical unity is just the substratum of the horizontal one, i.e. that the actual constitution of the object is merely a consequence of the unity of apperception. This result sets the stage for Hegel's final attack on the idea of an essence-substratum. In the *Lectures*, Hegel laments that "Kantian philosophy no doubt leads reality back to self-consciousness, but it can supply no reality to this essence of self-consciousness" (LHP III, 426)—transcendental apperception hovers above the experience it grounds as a "beyond." It is the task of the section "Emergence of the *Sache* into Existence" (ibid. 100–103) to critically probe into this substratal dimension in Kant's epistemology. Hegel opens this section by remarking that

The thing [*Sache*] *is*, before it *exists*; and indeed its is first as essence, or the unconditioned. Second, it has being-there, i.e. it is determined, and in the twofold fashion we have considered, on the one hand in its conditions, in the other in its ground (L II, 102).

Before we spell out what Hegel means by "existence," let us give flesh to the other highly abstract terms of this quotation. Once more, they are a reference to Kant, as will appear readily in this passage from the *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*

The *I* is self-contained, since it is the transcendental unity of apperception, unity of a double, of *the* pure intuitions and of the pure concepts, and unity of the two

(W 20, 349).

The transcendental unity of apperception is the substratum-essence which is the unity of concept and intuition, but whose being is not parasitic on the



dialectic between the two sides. Likewise, the true being of both concept and intuition is not understood as their genuine identification in the object of experience—their unity is limited to the subjective one of the schema, but in the object of experience thought and intuition “are tied in an external, superficial way, just as a piece of wood and a leg may be bound by a cord” (LHP III, 441). And for this reason the three moments of thought, intuition and their transcendental unity simply *are*, instead of existing: that is, their respective immediacies are not thematically constituted through a relationship with the other. Hegel is here intensifying the classical sense of existence implied by the Latin *ex aliquo sistere*, which means to thematically owe one’s being to the other (Erdman, §109, n. 3). Since Kant reductively understood existence as mere aconceptual being-there (LHP III, 454), he “does not attain to that very synthesis of Concept and Being, or in other words, he does not comprehend existence” (ibid, 452).<sup>23</sup> This tells us that Hegel’s deduction of ‘existence’ is not a dubious deduction of spatiotemporal presence from transcendental conditions *à la* Fichte. The obscure utterance “when the totality of the conditions is present, the thing enters into existence” (L II, 102) means exactly this: the definitive jettisoning of the one-sided substratum, and the exhibition of the object of experience as the complete immanence of logical forms of unity in the reciprocal *ex aliquo sistere* of the ordered multiplicity of the object of experience.

The section *Emergence of the thing into existence* is consecrated to this task, by showing that the three moments of Kantian epistemology (apprehension, categories and sense-data) do not relate substratally to one another, but instead coalesce into a genuine identity. For Kant, the full presence of categorial unity in the given was only an infinite task: a dynamic category could have *A* temporally constrain *B* only if *A* was in turn constrained by *C*, and so on—this was because *A* was intrinsically relationless, and its imposition of constraints on *B* could only be explained through a third. Given these premisses, it stands to reason that he would have cringed at Hegel’s “when the totality of conditions are present. . . .” Against this, Hegel reiterates the non-atomic status of the manifold conditions: the determinate bit of sense-data “is not truly determined by another as condition . . . but it makes itself through itself into a moment of another . . . its immediacy is only through the reflection of the ground-relationship” (L II, 101). The underlying message is that if we have sense data *A* and *B*, and the knowing subject, the totality is present. Unity ceases to be just a transcendent substratum, its form can fully present itself in those two sensuous elements.

Hegel then looks at the same dynamic from the perspective of the pure logical forms of unity, as opposed to the immediacy of the conditions (*ibid*):

The ground relates negatively to itself, makes itself into a posited being [i.e. it effectively becomes the ground of a grounded] and grounds the conditions: but for the fact that such an immediate being-there is determined as a posited, the ground sublates it and for the first time [erst] makes itself into a ground. This reflection is also the mediation of the unconditioned thing through its negation with itself

(L II, 101–102).

As I remarked previously, the ground does not simply lump together a condition with other conditions, but assigns to that condition an epistemically grounding (or grounded) role vis-à-vis other conditions: the sensible "representation in me is determined as accidental, but it can also be determined as effect, thing-in-itself, cause, effect, multiplicity" (W 20, 348). So it is only through the conditions taking up the mediational work of ground, that the latter for the first time fulfills its essence: even here, its conception as substratally independent of mediation proves to be wrong. This is why Hegel claims that the "positing [of categorial relations] is the coming out of the ground toward itself and its simple disappearance" (L II, 103), namely, its disappearance as a substratum.

This does not mean that we do away altogether with the notion of a ground. Instead, we simply cease to see it as an element remaining beneath or beyond the synthesized elements, and envision it as the immanent interconnection of the elements themselves. In this scenario of systematic, reciprocal grounding, the ground is just as much a grounded. This horizon is called *existence*

Existence is the immediate unity of inward reflection and reflection-into-another. Therefore, it is the indeterminate multitude of existents . . . they form a *world* of interdependence and of an infinite connectedness of grounds with what is grounded. The grounds are themselves existences, and the existents are also in many ways grounds as well as grounded  
(E §123).

In this respect, the bond of unity between two *Sein*-elements is no longer just the transcendental one, but is part and parcel of the elements themselves. According to Hegel, Kant himself had the resources to draw this conclusion, instead he failed to see in his object of experience the "perceptive understanding or an understanding perception" (LHP III, 441) that he hinted at in the idea of the schematism of the pure understanding (*ibid*). If Hegel is right, we have finally overcome the separateness between essence

and being, and have deduced appearance as the immanence of *Wesen* within *Sein*. We must now turn to the analysis of this new construal of the Absolute, whose nature recalls a graceful image from Novalis:

The whole rests, so to speak, like the playing people who form a circle without chairs and seat each on the knees of the other.<sup>24</sup>

## Chapter Four

# The Critique of the Scientific World-Picture

In Galileo's day the awakening from metaphysics to the hard observation of reality must have been, judging by all sorts of evidence, a veritable orgy and conflagration of matter-of-factness! But should one ask what mankind was thinking of when it made this change, the answer is that it did no more than what every sensible child does after trying to walk too soon; it sat down on the ground, contacting the earth with a most dependable if not very noble part of its anatomy, in short, that part on which one sits. The amazing thing is that the earth showed itself to be uncommonly receptive, and ever since that moment of contact has allowed men to entice inventions, conveniences, and discoveries out of it in quantities bordering on the miraculous

Robert Musil, *The Man Without Qualities*

### 1. THE PARADOX OF EXISTENCE: ESSENCE AS THE VANISHING OF ESSENCE

The closing arguments of the last chapter converged on one point: if there can be no 'vertical' essences functioning as substratum, essence-talk can only be that of a 'horizontal' ontology, where there is no unmediated mediator: each element grounds other aspects, and is inescapably mediated in return. Hegel defines this new understanding of essence as 'existence', and sees in Kant one of its primary representatives

By existence [*Existenz*], Kant understands determinate being, in the sense that something appears in the overall context of experience, i.e. in the determination of a being-other and in relation to another. Thus, as existent

something is mediated through another, and existence in general is the side of its mediation (L II, 106).

Kant has the merit of doing violence to the apparent immediacy of empirical reality, and of showing how both the object and its relationship to other objects is a web of relationships: *esse is ex aliquo sistere*. Hegel would claim that reason for this thematic emphasis on the field of experience is lost on Kant himself. Ironically, the reason why Kant can talk about a coherent sphere of interrelated being is because of his incoherent account of the thing in itself. On paper, the truly ultimate essence of appearances does not lie in their systematic interrelationships, but rather in the underlying thing-in-itself. However, since the noumenon would lose its 'in-itselfness' by being in any relationship to appearance, it turns out that the *Ding* (and here Hegel's irony is patent) is that which grounds phenomena precisely by being absent in phenomena: "only the vanished mediation is simultaneously the ground" (L II, 107-108). Other instances of the same pattern: since a thing is absent from the properties it supports, the properties themselves become essential (ibid, 112-117); properties without a thing cannot in their turn define an horizon of things, and their demise ushers in the 'matters' of 19<sup>th</sup> century's *Stoffenmetaphysik* (ibid, 118-125). These are the categories of modern philosophy, and they hinge on a negative ontology, the rejection of static essences; in so doing, however, they forego a positive justification of their own claims to objectivity, which is why they are "existence, the still essence-less [*wesenlose*] appearance" (L II, 126, *emphasis mine*).

Thus, if Hegel were to appropriate Musil's witty image, he would deny that our rear end put us finally in touch with a positive structure of reality, to which the aprioristic claims of scholastic philosophy had to remain blind. Instead, it was our very falling down—our rejection of Aristotelian essences—which defined a world of things and properties. The disappearance of the ground *is* the very ground we end up sitting on.

It is not a very stable ground, however: we have a rejection of a vertical essence in order to make sense of the horizontal one, but this ends up undermining the latter. Any identification of an interrelated cluster of elements relies already on something above and beyond the horizontal interrelation. A set of properties needs the concept of a particular substance, in order to decide what gets to count, and what doesn't, as a member of that interrelation. This is so true, that we will see that each of the 'horizontal' categories openly rejects one vertical, substratal (or superstratal, if you will) component only to tacitly enlist another. For instance, the variables of a law of physics dispose with Scholastic form, and are supposed to be grounded only by their

constant quantitative relationship; on the other hand, since experience by itself cannot offer universal constancy, there is an appeal vertical a noumenal sphere which “opens itself over the appearing world” (L II, 135).

This type of contradiction drives on the logic of this chapter: the systematic overcoming of horizontal relations involving a hidden substratal aspect. Each time, this is achieved by depriving of sense the specific substratum-concept: if our articulation of the nature of phenomena is the same as our account of the substratum, the distinction between them is no longer tenable, and the noumenon collapses into the the plane of interconnected appearance. We will see this pattern of argument already at work in the discussion of the Kantian *Ding an sich*. Hegel is aware, however, that a principle of unity is indispensable complement to a coherent account of an horizontal essence. He will clinch his case only if the dialectic of ‘Appearance’ finally yields a principle that is immanent to the interconnection, but cannot be reduced to it. To put it roughly then, the critique of the categories of modern philosophy should make clear that they willy-nilly presuppose the concept of a Spinozistic *natura naturans* which does not transcend *natura naturata*.

## 2. THE *DING AN SICH* AS THE ‘FEAR OF TRUTH’: FROM EXISTENCE TO APPEARANCE

Let us follow Hegel as he tries to make superfluous the notion of a *Ding*. The world of existent objects involves an appeal to and an exclusion from a noumenal realm, which should result in an ontological independence of the phenomenal. But the same pattern is at work in the non-sensible sphere! Consider that the *Ding an sich* is arrived at through abstraction from sensible immediacy: “the thing-in-itself is nothing but the empty abstraction from all immediacy” (L II, 114). That is, we reach the *Ding* through a reflection on the manifold, yet no element of the manifold is supposed to be a determination of the *Ding* itself. Since the *Ding* requires an appeal to existence, but no existent element can figure in the thing-in-itself, there is a ‘vanishing of the mediation’, and the *Ding an sich* turns out to be metaphysically autonomous. And yet, we could not have drawn the inference to the *Ding* without a phenomenal starting point. This is a theoretical embarrassment that is not solved by reducing appearances to a merely subjective cognitive prop to be jettisoned once we postulate the thing: appearances are only “an external reflection” (L II, 110), the being-for-us of the thing (“the thing-in-itself has color only brought to the eye, smell to the nose, etc.” *ibid*). But this is a fatal move: severing appearance from the *Ding* entails that sense-data enjoy the self-standing, in-itself status that was supposed to be the exclusive hallmark

of the noumenon—it thus has no need of an underlying *Ding*, which can be safely dispensed with.<sup>1</sup>

The same conclusion follows if we focus on the metaphysical status of the cognizing subject: the distinction between appearance and *Ding* in-itself is appropriate only if appearance and its structure can be explained as the distortion emerging out of some relation between *Ding* and subject. However, since the *Ding* is by hypothesis relationless, the self turns out to be monadic just as much as the thing-in-itself: “as the other against what is in-itself, is only self-sublation and its turning to being-in-itself” (L II, 111). That the self acquires thereby noumenal status is made clear in the earlier F&K:

The “I think” is to be transformed into an absolute noumenal point [ . . . ]  
a fixed noumenal unit conditioned by infinite opposition, and absolute in  
this finitude (F&K, 83).

The same point is taken up in *Essence*:

Now, in what Kant names the concept or in the representation as such—that is, something insofar as it is simply taken to be self-related—there is not its mediation. In abstract self-identity opposition is left away (L II, 106).

That is, the Kantian categories are functions of synthesis whose unity is not predicated on the integration of difference. Each category finds in the object only the structure it posits therein, which means that although it relates to an other (it is ‘conditioned by infinite opposition’ (F&K, 83) to the manifold), the formal relations articulated by the category itself obey the principle of non-contradiction, and thus cannot thematize the idea of a supersensible essence that mediates itself through sensibility—in the category, “opposition is left away” (L II, 106). To cut to the chase: through its comportment toward the sensuous, the Ego manifests itself as a *Ding an sich*, since its categories are fundamentally not other-relating.

Karl Reinhold mounted an ingenious defense of the thing/subject distinction in light of the unadmissability of a relation between them. Ignoring the unpromising path of a direct relation between subject and in-itself, he exploited the idea of an indirect relationship: sealed off from one another, *Ding* and subject have a direct causal impact on the inner structure of representation. The field of interconnected sense-data (*Existenz* L II, 111) is the middle ground (*Mitte*, *ibid.*) between the two noumenal poles. Hegel’s stress

on the 'middle' role of representation is an explicit reference to Reinhold's *Vorstellungsphilosophie*: the idea that the first principle of philosophy is representation (understood as the form of an elementary content of consciousness as such), while representation itself involves the relationality to a cognizing subject and to an underpinning *Ding* (*The Foundation of Philosophical Knowledge*, in BKH, 72). These appearances are made possible by the self's categories (formally) and by the thing (qua substratum of the sensuous matter), although we cannot in any way ascribe to the subject and to the thing any structural feature of the *Vorstellung*.

Once he sets up the problem this way, however, Reinhold cannot claim that subject and object are anything more than elements of representation. Since the Reinholdian distinction between matter (referred to the *Ding*) and form (referred to the Ego) (*Reinhold, Beiträge I*, 188: taken from Frank 1997, 242) is a distinction internal to representation, it is illicit to construe it as anything more than that. Hence the distinction between subject and object is meaningless, if it is taken to refer to anything extrarepresentational, as G. E. Schulze observed (*Aenesidemus*, in BKH, p. 109).<sup>2</sup> This is how Hegel takes up and develops Schulze's point:

Inessential existence has its self-reflection in the thing-in-itself. Primarily it refers to it as to its other; but as the other against what is in-itself, it [inessential existence] is only its own sublation, and the becoming to a self-standing status [*das Werden zum An-sich-sein*]. The thing in itself is thus identical with external existence (L II, 110-111).

The logic of representation requires an extrarepresentational reality as its source and essence (*Vorstellung* is an "inessential existence" that has "its self-reflection in the thing-in-itself"). However, it is impossible that representation represent the 'in-itself'; the very moment it does so, the 'in-itself' has become 'for-another'. So the other-directedness of representation "is only its own sublation", which means that the *Ding* is only an internal content of consciousness; this emancipation from an alleged outerness entails that the representation is "self-standing", enjoying the character of a *Ding an sich*. So, contrary to Reinhold, subject and object are two items of one and the same representational field.

That which appeared as an existence external to it [to representation], is therefore its internal moment. It is also therefore a self-repelling thing-in-itself, which relates itself to itself as to another (L II, 111).



Representation hinges on an internal opposition, but we no longer can avail ourselves of the conceptual tools to describe it as a subject/object opposition. The subjective unit of consciousness would have to be somehow be the expression of a noumenal subject, but we have seen that all talk of substratum is ultimately untenable if, like Reinhold, we start from the 'Cartesian Theatre' of consciousness. If the subject goes, so does the object: by its own lights, *Vorstellungsphilosophie's* subject/ object distinction has to be degraded to the opposition of two things standing over against each other ("therefore there are several [*mehrere*] things" L II, 111). It's as if Hegel wanted to show here that the dualistic stance of the *Second Position of Thought* must necessarily collapse into the realism of the *First Position*.

Now we are faced with a difficulty. We need the conceptual resources to distinguish between these two things, but we can no longer articulate it by an appeal to an objective and/or subjective noumenon. An immanent, qualitative discrimination between the two things would have to entail that they have some quality in common—which would mean that the being of each is dependent on its relationship to the other, a flagrant contradiction to the idea of a thing. If we want to hold onto the idea of two things, the only way to do so is through the concept of a property.

A property is that through which a thing can be relate to another without foregoing its complete ontological independence. The thing can shift the burden of relation upon the properties, and yet be unaffected by the relation as the inert substratum that carries the properties themselves. Hegel bears out as follows the dual character (essential and inessential) of the idea of a property:

The thing-in-itself is thus (as it has turned out) essentially not only such a thing-in-itself that its properties are the positedness of an external reflection [the relationship to an other thing], but they are its own determinations, through which the thing comports itself in a determinate way (L II, 113).

Again, what is entailed by property-talk in general is that there are at least two things. Indeed, a property is that through which we identify a thing as the thing that it is (L II, 116), in the sense that a cluster of properties constitutes the identifying comportment (*verhalten*) of the thing in which they inhere vis-à-vis other things. The impenetrability of a thing, its flammability, its distinctive breaking-point are all features that make sense in the framework of a relationship of a thing with other things. And here comes the dialectical reversal: it is so true that the properties exhaust the nature of a

thing, that we are no longer allowed to think of a thing as a substratum beneath the properties themselves:

This mention of the ground-relationship is not to be taken in the sense that the thing in general is determined as the ground of its properties...The property is not distinguished from its ground, nor does it simply constitute being-posit-ed. Instead, it is the ground passed into its externality and thus truly reflected in itself; the property as such is the ground

(L II, 114).

The properties are not a 'showing' through which a 'shower' manifests itself; on the contrary, what grants to properties their relevance is precisely the fact that the notion of a thing has sunk into irrelevance. The presence of the *Ding* in its properties fails to exercise normative constraints over what gets to count as its property and what does not: there is no genuine inner that functions as a benchmark for the several possible configurations of the outer.

A book is a thing, and each of its pages is a thing, and just as well each little piece of its pages, and so on to infinity. The determinateness through which a thing is only *this* thing lies solely in its properties [...] To the thing without properties remains thus nothing but the abstract being-in-itself; an inessential extent and an external bringing-together [*zusammenfassen*] (L II, 116).

Or, as Musil quipped, a man without properties is properties without a man. The properties are ground because of the collapse of the *Ding* as an inwardness capable of effectively steering the selection of the relevant identifying marks. This has the further consequence of having us to re-evaluate the very notion of a property: the term makes implicit reference to an owner that can freely dispose of what is possessed. But if the identification of the owner is totally parasitical on the arbitrary choice of properties, then it is no longer the case that the owner-thing itself functions as an anchor stabilizing a given cluster of sensuous dimensions: the thing is "the undetermined and powerless connection" (L II, 117). The upshot is that the very idea of an owner has to be jettisoned, and hence the correlative notion of property be laid aside, in favor of that of a "matter" (*ibid*). What offers itself as illusorily self-standing thinghood is an arbitrary constellation of substrata.

It is essential to seize again on the underlying point, lest this whole section of the *Logic* appear as a rhapsody of categories. The sequence property/matter/force/inner-outer is driven by the fact that while each category is

supposed to enshrine a relational dynamic, each of them suffers from a vestigial presence of the substratum-logic that had to be supplanted. For instance, while the property X makes sense only as the possibility of a specific relation with a given object, the property itself is defined as the property of a substratum. The organizing principle of the sequence becomes clear just by noticing that there is an increasing fluidification at play: the goal is to flesh out relation without an appeal to substrata. The (now obsolete) early 19<sup>th</sup> century idea of 'stuff' is a step in that direction.

The difference of one thing from another rests on whether or not several matters are to be found in it [*sich in ihm* befinden]. . . . [the properties] go beyond this thing, they continue in another, and to belong to this thing is no limitation for them. Just as little, moreover, do they limit each other, since their negative relation is only the powerless *this* (L II, 120).

The implication is that the discontinuous world of things is a mere surface, since the discretionality that each *res* should impose to its distinctive grouping of properties is illusory—the 'stuffs' of any thing continue also in the neighboring objects, albeit in a quantitatively different configuration. Pursuing this line of inquiry further, chemists sought to de-reify phenomena like color, smell, taste by tracing them back to a light-stuff, color-stuff, smell-stuff, etc (L II, 118). Hegel has easy play in showing that this attempt is guilty of the crudity of replicating the problem in the explanation (*ibid*). But even if less ingenuously it is conceded that invisible 'stuffs' cannot structurally replicate the macro-level, their concept still suffers from a fatal problem.

At first blush, it would seem that matters are the ultimate, self-standing building blocks of sensuous experience. Each matter is what it is by not being other matter(s): in a by now familiar modality, determinate presence is *eo ipso* exclusive. This poses straightaway a logical problem, since the thing as an empty congeries of matters entails the coexistence of several of them (L II, 121). How can we square the contradictory requirement of copresence and mutual exclusivity? It won't do to say that the several matters are preserved from reciprocal encroachment through a stratified, layered disposition allocating to each matter an exclusive area within the *Ding*

Thus, where one of these matters *is*, in one and the same point there is also the other the thing does not have in one other place its color, in another its smell-stuff, in a third its heat-stuff, etc. Rather, in the point in which it is warm, it is also colored, sour, electrical, *etc* (*ibid*).

Loath to accept the contradictory implications of this point, scientific understanding tries to make it harmless through the notion of *porosity*

Since now these matters are not outside one another, but are in one *this*, they are taken to be porous, so that one exists in the interstices [*Zwischenraum*] of the other (*ibid.*).

So, while the naked eye (tongue, touch, etc.) seems to confirm the coexistence of different sensuous dimensions in one and the same point, non-dialectical thought takes refuge in the infinitely small, interpreting apparent copresence as interstitial being-outside-one-another. But this stratagem relocates at the infinitesimal level the same contradiction.

But the further moment in the concept of the thing is that in the *this*, one matter is present were the other is, and the penetrator in this point is also penetrated, or the self-standing immediately is also the ontological independence [*Selbstständigkeit*] of the other. This is contradictory; but the thing is nothing but this very contradiction—for this reason it is appearance [*Erscheinung*] (L II, 122).

The point is cogent: to prevent matters A and B from encroaching upon each other, the strategy is that of dividing the space they occupy into two mutually interstitial areas. But within each of these two areas, we cannot neatly insulate one matter: even the other has to be present. Of course, we can begin the infinite regress of further subdivisions, but Hegel is right in pointing out that this approach does not solve the problem, it only defers its solution to infinity.

In sum: we cannot separate the self-standing presence of one matter from that of the other—the presence of one matter is also the presence of the other. Hegel claims that just this pattern is at play in the notion of an appearance (*Erscheinung*). By appearance, Hegel means phenomena in their abstracted, scientifically quantitative form: for instance, the pitching of a baseball is an appearance of the  $f=m \bullet a$  law. Consider  $f=m \bullet a$ : the quantity of each variable can be taken as grounding and as being grounded by the quantity of the other variables, so that the fact that there is *no* unmediated factor is part and parcel of the scientific law itself. The superiority of ‘appearance’ over ‘existence’ is that now there is no residual, unmediated substratum. The individual components  $f$ ,  $m$  and  $a$  are “simple, self-relating content-determinations” (L II, 130), but at the same time “each is only insofar as the other is” (*ibid.*); that is, the quantitative being of each part both determines and is determined by the quantitative being of the other. The ‘=’ sign is thus a more

sophisticated incarnation of the rigid copula at play in ordinary judgements, since it implies a relative 'fluidification' of the relata, the idea of a unity-within-difference of the parts with whole. Essence is the formation-rule of appearances, and the gist of this rule is quantitative constancy.

Essence does not remain behind or beyond the appearance; instead it is, so to speak the infinite goodness that releases its semblance [*Schein*] into immediacy and grants it the joy of being-there [*Dasein*]. When posited in this way appearance does not stand on its feet. and does not have its being in itself but within another. Just as God, the essence, is goodness, by virtue of lending existence to the moments of his inward shining in order to create a world, so he proves himself at the same time to be the might that rules it, as well as the justice that shows the content of this existing world to be mere appearance, whenever it wants to exist on its own account (E §131, Z).

In this unusually lyrical moment, Hegel encapsulates the defining traits of the horizon of the scientific revolution. The scientist no longer worries about any underlying substrata, since to envision the natural world as the realm of appearance is to imply that the essence is on the surface, in the stable correlation of various structural moments of appearance itself.<sup>3</sup> This correlation is not transcendent: each moment of appearance explicitly incorporates its ontological indebtedness to an other (it is "being-posited with its ground", L II, 128), but the other is just as much founded by the first ("the ground of the first [aspect of appearance] is likewise a posited being", *ibid.*). Appearances do not send us looking elsewhere for their definitory dialectic. The 'democratic' nature of the identity-operator signifies the disappearance of an ontological *prius*, the fact that we can no longer distinguish stably a founding from a founded dimension, and a break with a rank-ordering teleology. It is this dimension that Hegel means by the celebratory "joy of being-there" that appearances are.

On the other hand, although individual appearances (e.g. the free fall of this stone, the mechanical action of this lever) are appearances *of* a totality (the law), it is also true that each appearance is only *one* particular presentation of that totality. The law of gravity is at work both in my dropping a pen and in the collapse of a building: in the first case, the final velocity of a body prior to impact is considerably smaller than in the second, yet it would be absurd to say that one phenomenon presents the law 'more' than the other. Each new phenomenon is both a confirmation and a refutation of all phenomena

of the same sort, insofar as it is a different repetition of the same (in our case, of  $s=t^2$ ). Since law not only confirms, but undercuts each of its instantiations with alternative self-presentations, we can follow Hegel in seeing it as the secularized equivalent of Anaximander's judicial God: law is "the justice that shows the content of this existing world to be mere appearance, whenever it wants to exist on its own account" (*loc cit*).

On the other hand, law does not completely live up to the function of articulating the essence of appearance:

We have to decide whether something is the whole process, or merely one moment of it. As law, the universal *has* also a process in itself and lives only as process; but it *is not* part of the process, it is not in process, it contains instead its two sides [part and whole] and is itself without process (E §258, Z; Petry trans, amended; emphasis mine).

"Lack of process" means a lack of explanatory process. Law asserts the quantitative identity of the parts, but it does not explain it: "in the concept of the fall is not included that the square of the time corresponds to the covered distance" (L II, 132). Nor are quantitatively uniform aspects in a genuine internal relation: "one can very well think of time without space, and of space without time" (*ibid*, 133). Finally, there appear elements in the law itself which are purely taken from experience, and which are not related necessarily to the abstract variables at play: our planet's gravity is expressed as  $g=9.8.m^2$ , and the 9.8 magnitude is one of those factors only "known from experience" (*ibid*, 133). Thus, Hegel concludes that while the law postulates a reciprocal, necessary interdefinition of space and time, "in the law itself this essential unity has not yet appeared" (*ibid*, 132).

To restate the central issue: the identity-sign of physical law expresses a relation of constant difference, in that the ratio between the two variable-groups remains constant throughout their respective ranges of change ("appearance in its mutation is also a remaining" L II, 133). However, law is silent on *why* this constancy takes place. What is the hidden internal relation between the variables glossed over by the quantitative reach of the law?

Hegel's contemporaries were sensitive to the problem, which the force-metaphysics of the time strove to address. One could take—so they reasoned—a specific group of variables as the manifold expression of specific, unitary force: for instance, the relation between space and time in the law of free fall can be considered an expression of the force of gravity. Under this construal, force works as the 'inner' of physical law, and thus as the vertical component that should interrelate the variables heretofore

only bound by a formal horizontal relation. The point is explicit in the *Phenomenology*:

“It [law] is the concept of the force, an abstraction which reduces in itself the differences of what attracts and what is attracted. So, for instance, simple electricity is force; but the expression of this difference falls in the law: this difference is positive and negative electricity. In the law of free fall, force is the simple, the gravity which has this law: the magnitudes of the different moments of motion (elapsed time and covered distance) behave reciprocally like root and square” (W 3, 122-123)

Seized as a noumenon, force embodies the unity of the variables. Seen as a phenomenon, force is the externalization of that unity into a manifold of variables, in a ratio spelled out by the law. Now, however, the law is no longer groundless, since its specificity formalizes the defining behavior of an essentially simple force. In the *Logic's* discussion of the “in-and-for-itself world” (L II, 133-140) it is just this deepening of the concept of law that is at stake: with the inclusion of a noumenal plane, law is no longer “only a side of the whole, whose other side was the appearance, but is itself the whole” (L II, 135). Yet, the word ‘force’ appears only once in those pages, and almost as an aside (L II, 136)—that concept becomes thematic only later (L II, 148-154). Possibly, this displacement of force in the categorial sequence was brought about by a change in Hegel's metaphysical agenda. Instead of immediately considering the *Kraftenmetaphysik's* attempt to solve problems of unity in the physical sciences as he did in 1807, in 1813 he decides to tackle first a more distinctly philosophical attempt to engage those problems: namely, Schelling's Philosophy of Nature stage (1706-1801). The result of Hegel's critique is that Schelling's Absolute cannot remain separated from the sensible: instead, the sensible is the expression of the absolute, and thus part and parcel of it. Schelling has to admit his implicit Herderian expressionism, and the *Logic's* subsequent treatment of ‘force’ (and also of whole/part, inner/outer) is to be seen as an examination of the logic of expression which had been blocked by Schelling's dualistic scheme.

### 3. A SPINOZISM OF NATURE: HEGEL'S CRITIQUE OF SCHELLING'S *NATURPHILOSOPHIE*

On two separate occasions, Schelling gives to his own philosophy of nature the fascinating label “Spinozism of Physics” (FSNP, 117, note; *ibid.*, 194); it deserves this denomination because it sees any entity as a contraction of *the* overarching organism, Nature, and it views the latter as a self-causing

productive force. The idea of self-causation seems peculiarly suited to answer a question which the third *Critique* had posed on the agenda: is there a sphere where the principle of freedom and that of causal determinism can be united (CJ 15; Kroner L II, 11)? Spinoza's monistic philosophy is in turn suited to implement that unity: Schelling observes that it is in the *Ethics* that we find mind and matter as modifications of the same principle (Ideas for a Philosophy of Nature, Cambridge, CUP, p. 15), and the coordination of the two aspects within each finite mode.

The task is then to show the whole (Nature) in the natural organism, "the exhibition of the infinite in the finite . . . is the highest problem of all systematic science" (FSNP 15). Hegel endorses this general intention, as can be gleaned by his sweeping "*Du hast entweder Spinozismus oder keine Philosophie*"—you have either Spinozism or no philosophy at all (LHP 283). Spinoza is the teacher of a prerequisite, crucial mistrust toward the ultimacy of finite as such. But not any form of mistrust will do: if Spinoza's is the model any aspiring monist must come to grips with, shortcuts are not allowed. Jacobi's *salto mortale* secured the ultimate epistemic ground for the subject, but it left unresolved the issue of the relationship of the objective world to God. That Schelling thought the same of Fichte's "inverted Spinozism" is evinced by his pointing out the one-sidedness of the transcendental approach, which neglects to explain the emergence of the mental from nature stage (FSNP 194). Given this, it makes sense that Schelling's philosophy of nature (1706-1801 ca.) was the gateway to Schelling's mature reappropriation of Spinoza, his philosophy of identity (1801-1804 ca). Hegel's Doctrine of Essence retraces just these steps: consider that the engagement with Spinoza in the last third of Essence (the *Absolute*) rests on a preliminary discussion (in *Appearance*) of the categories of natural science and their reinterpretation by the natural philosopher.

Hegel's retracing is a critical one, however—as is known, his endorsement of Schelling's philosophy of nature is qualified. On the one hand, he praises Schelling for having fleshed out the very idea of a philosophy of nature.<sup>4</sup> A philosophy of nature is superior to ordinary physics not because it seeks to think nature (ordinary physics does that too, "since its determinations of forces, laws, &c., are thoughts" LHP III, 535), but because it seeks to 'dynamicize' scientific categories, i.e. it sees each of them as an expression of a subject/object dynamic.<sup>5</sup> On the other hand, Hegel charges Schelling with merely assuming the ultimate identity of the subjective and objective,<sup>6</sup> and of modeling Nature upon Fichte's oppositional scheme of the I—thus remaining a Fichtean in the very act of going beyond Fichte. Hegel writes that in his natural philosophy, Schelling



"starts to a certain measure, though unconsciously, from the Fichtean form of construction" (LHP III, 515).

The crypto-Fichteanism charge entails that Schelling saddles his philosophy of nature with an untenable gap between the supersensible and the sensible. That there is a gap is something Schelling himself would not deny: for him, metascientific reflection involves "the reduction of all the original antitheses which appear in Nature to that original antithesis in the heart of Nature, *which does not, however, itself appear*" (FSNP, 205). With this program, Schelling trades Spinozistic pantheism for the dualism of the Deus Absconditus, via a clear structural analogue of the Fichtean *Ich*. Just as Fichte's original *Ur-theilung* is the pre-experiential condition for the subject/object opposition of any empirical state of consciousness, Schelling's original antithesis is the transcendent condition of the polar structure of any natural phenomenon. Furthermore, just as Fichtean self is perennially *en route* to an archetypal wholeness (Kroner II, 17-18), Nature's original split is restored only asymptotically, through the production of phenomena which, by instantiating ever more adequately a fundamental equilibrium of forces, constitute a "dynamically graduated scale" (FSNP, 215). These are chapters in what we could call Nature's *Wiederbildungsroman*, although none of them ever succeeds full in the task of reconstitution, as underscored by the suggestive adage that any finite entity is "Nature's failed attempt to reach itself, to reach absolute rest" (SW L III, 43; Kroner II, 18).

But for Hegel, as we will see, a properly understood Spinozism of Physics should yield "*two* totalities of content in appearance" (L II, 138, emphasis mine), the source of meaning and structure should itself step completely in appearance. Our task will be to clarify the sense of that stepping-in and assess whether Hegel is right in claiming that Schelling's dualism contains the seeds of its own overturning. Let us now begin a targeted, synoptic view of Schelling's *Entwurf* and of the *Appearance* section of the Doctrine of Essence—even notoriously gnarly passages like those of the 'inverted world' will acquire a surprising coherence within this dialogic framework.

The literary trope of the *Bildungsroman* is more than suggested by Schelling, for whom nature is "a book open under our eyes, so that we can find in it the history of our spirit" (SW I, 307). However, if we are looking to read a history of "a blind drive that exerts its influence from crystallization upward to the highest point of organic formation" (FSNP 194), we must also keep in mind that Nature is "a very ancient author, which has written in hieroglyphs, and on colossal pages" as Schelling will say in his later *On University Studies* (SW L III, 268). In a terse paragraph, Schelling suggests why the categories of natural science are inadequate for the decoding of these

hieroglyphs, and why there is a need for the hermeneutics of a philosophy of Nature:

... If Nature can produce only the regular, and produces it from necessity, it follows that the origin of such regular and purposeful products must again be capable of being proved to be necessary in the relation of its forces, in Nature thought as independent and real—it follows *that therefore...the ideal must arise out of the real and admit of explanation from it*

(FSNP, 194).

The dogmatic statement of an organic monism can turn into knowledge only by showing concretely how individual types of phenomena instantiate the organic pattern of the whole: “the ideal must arise out of the real and admit of explanation from it”. And the mode of this arising is clearly indicated: while the scientist who deconstructs phenomena into a play of forces remains at a mechanical standpoint, the philosopher of nature instead must trace back that play to the *ur*-antithesis (“the origin of such . . . purposeful products . . . in the relation of its [Nature’s] forces”). Now, given that natural *Ur-theilung* generates a positive tendency toward production and a negative one opposing production (FSNP 205), the *Naturphilosoph* must redescribe a given type of phenomenon so as to show it as an opposition of two contradictory activities, with the involvement of a third term responsible for a relative stasis between the two activities. The oppositional moment brings out the subject/object nature of the phenomenon, the synthetic moment the subject/object identity.

Such a redescription is called a construction because it brings into explicit being the original oppositional structure that would have otherwise remained concealed in the phenomenon: “to philosophize about nature means to create Nature. . . . to quicken it with freedom and to set it into its own free development” (ibid 14). The building blocks of this constructions are not just the subjective creation of the productive imagination, but also expressions of “forces of nature”<sup>7</sup> (ibid, 195); but again, the challenge for a philosopher of nature is “to explain everything by the forces of Nature” (ibid), without relapsing into mechanistic determinism.

Hegel too is convinced that the categories of physics are inadequate from a metaphysical standpoint, and in need of a further elaboration at the hands of a philosophy of Nature (E §246, Z). Promisingly, the initial conceptual resources for that elaboration were already at hand: Hegel himself observes explicitly that the concept of polarity “has marked a great advance in the metaphysics of physics” (E §248, Z), since it consists precisely in the

spelling out of “the necessary relationship between two terms” (*ibid*). True, even scientific laws spell out a necessary relations between opposite clusters of variables, but only quantitatively so. Conversely, the logic of polarity is qualitative: given the defining quality of one extreme, we can a priori obtain that of its opposite through an inversion. The ground was ripe for an application of polarity to the heretofore morally quantitative view of law. The doctrine of Essence refers just to this revision of the concept of scientific law through the lenses of polarity. Law is now

Also the negative reflection in itself, so its sides do not behave toward each other merely as different sides, but they relate negatively to each other...the being-positing of one is also the being posited of the other, and each is not only its own posited being, but also that of the other, or each is itself this negative unity  
(L II, 134)

Praise is however qualified: Hegel complains also that “polarity is often applied indiscriminately, where it is completely out of place, for nowadays everything is full of polarity” (E §312, Z). It can’t be denied that this is also an attack on Schelling, who reads the oppositional core of *Naturphilosophie* through the lenses of polarity: “identity in duplicity and duplicity in identity . . . what else is meant by the expression *polarity*?” (FSPN, 157). Hegel criticizes polarity because although the two poles have implicitly the same essence, an actual unity of the two poles is never achieved (E §312 Z)—this is simply a variation of his attack on the Fichtean scheme. We now need to ask: is it the case that by making the case for synthesis Hegel hypostasizes (to say it with Foucault) desire into the object of desire? Is Schelling after all allowed, by his own lights, to hold on to polarity as the fundamental scheme of nature? As a preliminary step, let us dwell a little on Schelling’s treatment of the concept:

The organism is everything that it is only in opposition to its outer world. “There must be in the organism an original duplicity” means, therefore—it follows necessarily—precisely that *the organism must have a dual external world* [...] I ask, however, how is it possible that the organism belongs to two worlds at once? It is possible in no other way, I answer, *than if every anorganic world is itself really a DUAL world*. But is this not so, according to what we have deduced as condition of possibility of an anorganic world? In every anorganic world a *higher order* is mirrored, a *higher world*. Where these opposing orders contact one another THERE *activity exists* (FSPN, 107).

*The organism is everything that it is only in opposition to its outer world:* within the sensible sphere, the most sweeping polarity is that between the organic and the inorganic: what the one is, the other is not. When the organism is active, it is so upon a passive external world (even if only upon itself qua extended), when it is receptive, the external world impinges on it actively. At this point, a problem arises: how do we avoid the reduction of the organic to mechanism, once we allow the openness of the organism to external causal flow? *There must be in the organism an original duplicity:* an essential doubleness in the organism itself. The organism should be a mechanical structure, and at the same time a self-determining one. But doesn't this simply shift the contradiction within the organism itself? *The organism belongs to two worlds at once:* a two-world membership is supposed to preserve organic integrity: what is passivity at the sensible level is activity at the supersensible, and viceversa.

The two-world perspective entails that the organism is its own polar opposite. The sensible negative is the supersensible positive: pain is linked to the causal flow of an external world, but the fire I draw too near to bears no resemblance whatsoever to the pain I feel; supersensibly, pain is a subjective creation. The sensible positive is a supersensible negative: lack of external impingements is only an apparent boon, since it is only by reacting to the disruption brought about by the external world that the organism can continue its self-reproductive drive; in a handwritten note to his own manuscript, Schelling notes that "that which seems *most favorable* to life (absolute insusceptibility to this influence) becomes the cause of its demise. The phenomenon of life is paradoxical even in its cessation." (FSPN 68, *note*).

*Every anorganic world is itself really a DUAL world:* although the senses do not show a self-regulating pattern in the inorganic, this pattern is present in the supersensible level. Consider Schelling's treatment of the fundamental phenomenon of electricity. Even here any sensible instance is its own inverse on a supersensible plane, according to a universal law:

*A universal, uniformly acting cause maintains an equilibrium of negative and positive states, and so inhibits the matter [i.e. oxygen] from being lost either in one or the other extreme. The universal action acts on the positive in an oxidizing [i.e. negativizing] fashion, as on the negative in a deoxidizing [i.e. positivizing] fashion, and both effects coexist in Nature just as constantly as positive and negative electricity* (FSNP 151).

Schelling follows here Franklin's distinction: the positive pole is the one with the excess electrical charge flowing to the negative pole. Franklin's theory is

then supplemented with later advances in chemistry: in any electrical transaction between two bodies A and B, the positive pole is played out by the body with the greatest affinity for (greatest capacity to absorb) oxygen (ibid, 101). Schelling adds that as the positive pole transfers electricity, it acquires oxygen. But once it is completely oxidized, it loses the conductiveness that was the hallmark of the positive, thereby becoming negative (ibid). What is sensibly the positive electricity of a body is supersensibly a march toward a negative electric state.

Hegel distills the principles of Schelling's philosophy of nature in these lines:

The world that is in and for itself is the inverse of the appearing world...The two worlds are in this relationship: what is positive in the phenomenal world is negative in the world that is in and for itself, and conversely that which is negative in that one is positive in this one. The north pole in the phenomenal world is in and for itself the south pole and viceversa. Positive electricity is in and for itself negative, and so on. That which in apparent existence is evil, is good and lucky in and for itself  
(L II, 138).

Hegel makes it clear, through his examples, how these inversions have to do with both organic and inorganic: "Positive electricity is in and for itself negative, and so on. That which in apparent existence is evil, is good and lucky in and for itself" (L II, 138), the unwelcome check by the inorganic is at bottom a vital opportunity for my spontaneity.

At this point, Hegel enters a crucial phase of his confrontation with Schelling. It will be remembered that the aim of construction is to give us the supersensible essence of the sensible, "the exhibition of the infinite in the finite" (FSNP 15). Schelling's claim entails that the truth about any phenomenon is to be had at the supersensible level, and if we take the inversion trope at its letter, the supersensible level is the genuine original, while the other is the inverted replica. Since Schelling's idea of the "topsy-turvy" world implies that the supersensible world is in the upright position, and the sensible world has been turned upside down, it is entailed that the correct view is to be had by reversing the divisions of sensibility. It is just this avenue that Schelling has in mind, as we find out in the later (1802) dialogue *Bruno*:

Within the sphere of finite cognition, therefore, negation turns into positing and positing becomes negation! [ . . . ] In short, if we compare finite understanding to the supreme idea and to the way that all things

have their being therein, it looks like everything is upside down, almost like the things you see reflected in a pool of water (Bruno, 143-144).

Here we find again all the key themes: the two-world view, the inversion-relationship holding between worlds, and the superiority of the supersensible one. Here, this inversion stems from the fact that ordinary understanding presents as separated what in the supersensible absolute is a unity of finite and infinite. Although *sub specie aeternitatis* substance is prior to its accidents, our empirical perspective makes accidents prior to the substance; Locke's nominal substance is a clear example of this, since it is a precipitate of the properties met with in experience. This, then, is the logic of inversion: the negativity of accidents in the supersensible sphere is a positive in the sensible, and viceversa.

From Schelling's own perspective, the problem can be resolved by considering this reversal as the inevitable distortion of cognition, a distortion that would be inessential vis-à-vis the essential interpenetration of the two opposites in the absolute, which is truly the essential. So one must shift ultimately from the mediations of thought to the immediacy of the intuition of the absolute indifference, where one outstrips "those self-proclaimed philosophers who first posit unity, then multiplicity, and leave them simply opposed" (Bruno, 141). Differently put: Schelling's idea of the "topsy-turvy" world implies that the supersensible world is in the upright position, and the sensible world perverts it; even in the *Entwurf*, Schelling constantly refers to the supersensible perspective as the 'higher world'. For instance, in electricity what really counts despite sensible regional changes is that the total quantity of both positive and negative states remains unaltered, according to the law of Universal Equilibrium ("both effects coexist in Nature just as constantly as positive and negative electricity", FSNP 151).

This entails that the correct view is to be had by reversing the divisions of sensibility, by engaging in the inversion of an inversion.<sup>8</sup> Per se, this is not a pathway that Hegel criticizes. What he objects to is not the second inversion, but the fact that Schelling does not hold on to the first: that is, that he discards outright the essential status of the sensible as such. Schelling's Platonic trope of the sensible as "things you see reflected in a pool of water" makes it clear that the sensible is only the reverse image of essence, not the presence of essence itself. Along the same lines, he writes in the *Entwurf*: "the *whole*—the infinite—*mirrors* itself in each individual being in Nature" (FSNP 18). Even programmatically, his philosophy of nature aims at "the reduction of all the original antitheses which appear in Nature to that original antithesis in the heart of Nature, *which does not, however, itself appear*" (FSNP, 205). It is just this point that Hegel objects to, in his view essence is fully immanent in the sensible.

Hegel's general criticism of Schelling's dualism applies also to the central metaphor of polarity. Polarity recognizes an inversion relation between the supersensible *an sich* and the sensible *für uns*. Per se, Hegel agrees that this is a very significant result, since "only as things of another, supersensible world are things posited...as the true against that which simply is [*das Seiende*] (L II, 136). The problem is that polarity stops there, preserving the transcendence of the former over the latter:

Polarity of this kind limits itself only to the opposition; it is by means of the opposition however that there is also a positing of the return out of opposition into unity, and it is this third term which constitutes the necessity of the notion, a necessity which is not found in polarity (E §248, Z).

What Hegel means by the "return out of opposition into unity" is the overcoming of the surd between sensible and supersensible, showing that the ultimate nature of the in-itself is to be appearance.

It must be said at once that Schelling has his own reasons for refusing the effective presence of the in-itself in the phenomenal plane. Consider his Fichtean scheme:

While Nature does develop individuality, it is not really concerned with the individual....Nature strives constantly to cancel out duality and and to return to its original identity. This striving is precisely the basis for all activity in nature (FSNP 40).

Nature strives toward original identity, so it reproduces its antithesis as a sensible dyad of poles, but in such a way that the poles strive toward each other. On the other hand, if the poles were to become actually one, nature would reach a state of rest and lose its character of *active* identity. This is why the sensible tendency toward unification must engender also its opposite. Schelling expresses this pattern in terms of a Plotinian *hen diapheron*:

Unity in diremption only exists where the heterogeneous attracts and diremption in unity only where the homogeneous repels. Both necessarily coexist (FSNP 179).<sup>9</sup>

Consider these examples: in the magnet, the two poles are supersensibly one, which is why the two sensible poles strive toward each other—the heterogeneous attracts itself. But at the same time the supersensible homogeneous

repels itself, because the + sign now duplicates itself: the positive pole in one magnet, by magnetizing another piece of metal, creates in that piece another positive pole ("In magnetism identity is posited, but only through continuation of difference to infinity" SW I, 6, 331). The human kind is supersensibly one, which is why the two sexes are sensible poles which strive toward unity (heterogeneous attracts itself). At the same time, however, the homogeneous kind is divided, because the result of the unification-tendency is either a male or a female child (the homogeneous repels itself). The sexual division gives Nature the required obstacle against which it can exert again its synthetic moment (FSNP 39).

Hegel recognizes that natural phenomena never quite manage to fully achieve the identity of opposites; after all, Nature is the Idea in the form of otherness (E §247). What he does criticize in Schelling, however, is the resort to a transcendent supersensible sphere to account for the sensible oscillation between unity and diremption. Phenomenal striving (be it toward identity or diversity) has a phenomenal, not a transcendent root. The sensible world's activity is its own way of coping with *its own* internal dichotomy: in this sense, sensibility its own opposite, not the opposite of a transcendent supersensible one. But how does Hegel manage to enforce Ockham's razor on Schelling's dualism?

Hegel deploys two arguments against Schelling's transcendent supersensible. The first argument aims to show that this supersensible sphere is not entitled to the primacy that Schelling granted it. True, appearance is the reverse of the supersensible—but just as well one could say the world that is in and for itself is the reverse of the appearing world (L II, 138). We cannot distinguish between an original and inverted copy, since the supersensible world can just as well be taken as the inverted copy of the sensible! This being the case, the relationship between the two worlds "is essentially a becoming and a going-over [*übergehen*], no longer the ground relationship as such" (ibid). That is, essence-talk founders, since the logic of inversion debars us from seizing stably upon a pole as the essence, each pole is the inverted of the other.

His second argument aims at debunking altogether the idea of a transcendent supersensible, and the strategy is to show that each time Schelling appeals to the supersensible, he is actually helping himself to the sensible:

As a matter of fact, in this opposition of both worlds, their difference has vanished, and what had to be a world in and for itself, is itself an appearing world, and conversely the latter is in itself an essential world. The appearing world is initially determined as the reflection-in-other, so that its determinations and existences have in their other their ground and persistence.



But insofar as this other is likewise reflected in an other, so they [these determinations] relate in it only as an other that sublates itself, and so to itself. The appearing world is therefore in itself a law equal to itself.

L II, 138-139).

*What had to be a world in and of itself is itself an appearing world:* the law of universal equilibrium allegedly never appears directly (151). But it does appear directly, since the positivization of the negative is itself a sensible phenomenon: for instance, the negative check that I receive from the senses is positivized by the equally sensible assertion of my own spontaneous *Formbildung*—sensible, because the organism seeks to preserve itself qua sensible. *This other* [Schelling's supersensible law of universal equilibrium] *is likewise reflected in an other* [the sensible plane]: what is more, the form of the supersensible must be constrained by the form of the sensible, if it is to be its essence; there are well-defined limits on what gets to count as the supersensible essence of a sensible flower. That is, if no sensible flower had its own distinctive content, its essence would be an empty placeholder.<sup>10</sup> It is the constancy of the phenomenal that gets to decide as to what is to count as an essence: *Conversely the latter* [the sensible] *is in itself an essential world.*

Hegel effectively shows that, *malgré lui*, Schelling goes beyond that self-imposed limit: on paper, the essence of a given phenomenon is only supersensible, but on closer inspection it turns out that the role of essence is taken up by another sensible element. This does not mean that Hegel does away altogether with the idea of a supersensible, which would amount to a wholesale rejection of idealism. But the 'supersensible' undergoes a crucial meaning-shift in his hands: it is the immanent process of the sensible: "the appearing world is therefore in itself a law equal to itself" (L II, 138-139). This means that the totality of the sensible is its own opposite: it is processual, but in being structured by the process, the sensible is being structured by itself. "The appearing world is therefore in itself a law equal to itself" (L II, 139): the natural world is at once legislator and legislated. Thus, instead of a *natura naturans* transcending *natura naturata*, the legislating and legislated worlds form "two totalities of content *in appearance*" (L II, 140, emphasis mine).

However, while the plane of appearance contains legislated world actuality: it contains only potentially the continuity of process of the legislating world: that is, the sensible does not *show* its processual nature, and such processuality emerges as such only in our minds. It is so true that the sensible does not show its processual character, that in the process of knowing it we invert it:

By thinking things, we transform them into something universal; things are singularities, however, and the lion in general does not exist. We make them into something subjective, produced by us, belonging to us, and of course peculiar to us as men. .[it is] precisely this *inversion* which takes place; and consequently, what we have started upon may well seem to be impossible from the start. . . . (§246, addition, emphasis mine).

We must do things a necessary violence in order to know them—it is no accident that Hegel operates with a digestive model of cognition. But at the same time, this inversion paradoxically fulfills the essence of things, doing them an emancipatory violence. This entails nothing else than the fact that *objectively* essence is the inverse of itself: the essence of X is eo ipso universal, so it inverts itself by materializing into a concrete singularity X. Knowing is a second inversion that corrects the first. When we study Nature, we cure its essence from that internal split, restoring it to its universality: “The study of nature is therefore the liberation of what belongs to spirit within nature” (E §246, Z). But it is important to realize that, unlike Schelling, Hegel does not jettison the first inversion as the inessential plain of appearance; without including the particular within itself, the universal would remain abstract.

World (*Welt*) expresses in general the formless totality of the manifold; this world, both as essential and as appearing, has gone to the ground, insofar as the manifold has ceased to be a mere collection of different parts; so it is a Totality or Universe (*Universum*), but as Essential Relation (L II, 140).

As a corollary of his analysis, Hegel suggests that we drop altogether the concept of ‘world’, which denotes something yet incomplete, if only because it implies a normative subject standing over against it (be it God or the transcendental self). The concept of ‘universe’ or ‘totality’ is right at the threshold of Spinoza’s system, since it reinterprets Schelling’s supersensible/sensible complex in such a way that one and the same nature is both legislator and legislated. We cannot, however, leave it at a flat statement of identity: we need to flesh out a vocabulary of immanence, which allows us to distinguish between the immanent legislator and the legislated. We will see that the idea of expression, and more particularly of self-expression, is an important element of that vocabulary.

#### 4. ESSENTIAL RELATION: THE SEARCH FOR A VOCABULARY OF IMMANENCE

A hatchet was fetched. I gave the desk a terrible blow with it. Whether in my rage I aimed wrong or the drawer was just as stubborn as I, the

result was not what was intended. The drawer was shut, and the drawer stayed shut. But something else happened. . . a secret door that I had never noticed before sprung open. This door closed off a compartment that I obviously had not discovered. Here, to my great amazement, I found a mass of papers, the papers that constitute the content of the present publication . . . In my heart, I begged the desk's forgiveness for the rough treatment, while my thought found its suspicion strengthened—that the outer is certainly not the inner

Victor Eremita (Søren Kierkegaard) *Either/Or*

Although Kierkegaard seemingly got little from attending Schelling's classes (as we can glean from his letters), this amusing salvo at Hegel shows he did agree with Schelling's separation between inner and outer. But if Hegel is right, Schelling cannot hold on to the division and still call himself a Spinozist. The last main section of the *Doctrine of Essence* is a sustained, fascinating (if often highly controversial) engagement with the *Ethics*. As we will see, Hegel will take the expressivist notion of *Manifestation* as the internal benchmark against which Spinoza's system is to be assessed. Given this criterion, not even Spinoza has fully understood himself: since Spinoza suppresses the moment of self-determination in the Absolute, he cannot put coherently at work the idea of expression—there is no intelligible way to ascribe expression to an inert Substance. This not only means that the universal has to particularize itself without loss of integrity or of content, but also that the particular itself should be construed in some way as self-particularizing: if activity is only in the universal, then the particular is its mere image, and not a genuine *Entäusserung* of the universal itself. It is such a task that is behind the Hegelian attempt to 'understand Spinoza better than he did himself' via a reinterpretation of Substance into Subject.

If the end result of *Appearance* is that we finally manage to unify universal and particular through the idea of expression, this still leaves us a lot of leeway as to the shape of we can give to our metaphysics. For instance, the Herderian idea that being has to be 'fluidified' into the expression of forces, entails that *all* there is is expression, and thus it entails the impossibility of connecting universal and particular. If *all* there is is expression, then we are reduced to the celebration of mere particularity, but also to the demise of thought—Hegel is absolutely right when he says that thought *eo ipso* involves the universal. To be left with just the 'parts' leads, once more, to silence (no universality means no predication) or to the incoherent celebration of the particular: incoherent, because the particular is itself a whole, and thus itself an arbitrary collection of elements. In other words, a coherent

account of the connection between the whole and the parts as the immanence of the former in the latter hinges on the 'sublation', and not the outright rejection, of the distinction between an 'inner' and an 'outer'. The merit of Spinoza is that, as the sworn enemy of transcendence, he not only seizes upon the moment of expression, but he also retains (if imperfectly) the idea of a distinction between expressor and expressed.

It is in this light that we must read 'Essential Relation', the last subdivision of 'Appearance': its task is to eliminate dead-ended approaches to the problem of expression, and to establish Spinoza as the indispensable starting point for any coherent discussion of a metaphysics of self-presencing. There are two fundamental ways in which we can deprive ourselves of speculative progress: either by taking our bearings from the static 'whole/parts' dyad of classical rationalism, or by an unquestioning adherence to the Herderian metaphysics of forces. Let us consider briefly each of these avenues, keeping in mind that they do not so much break new territory, as they bring out more clearly categories that were already subjected to a criticism in Hegel's discussion of the scientific universe.

The original understanding of law hinged on the category of whole and parts. We have seen that law's bindingness is tautological: since it offers us no explanation of a qualitative internal relation between the variables it ranges over, *das Gesetz* amounts to the declaration that the parts are one, *but not as the parts they are*: the parts can become the whole only by their obliteration; in Hegelese, "the whole as such is equal not to the parts but to the whole" (L II, 145). The other side of this problem is that the actual manifoldness of the variables is incompatible with the actuality of the whole: the qualitative discontinuity between the variables is at once the negation of totality. The moment the parts become actual, the whole collapses (L II, 145)—the universal does not preserve itself in the parts.

But this criticism puts us now in the position to flesh out the true notion that was only imperfectly at work in whole and parts: the idea of an ontological 'translation' of unity into multiplicity. Hegel discusses in "Force and Externalization" the attempt to fulfill this desideratum: a force translates (*übersetzt*, L II, 149) itself in its unfolding. Hegel's appraisal of the force-ontology reflects both his Romantic strain as well as his Classical one. He follows the *Friühromantiker's* rejection of the mechanistic whole/part dynamic (the hinge of Cartesian rationalism), as a "thoughtless relationship" (E §136, R). But for Hegel's Classicist (unity-driven) vein, 'force' is still too poor a concept to furnish us with the Universal-particular unity we are looking for. After all, it is accidental to this force whether or not to unleash itself in an external manifestation, and as a matter of fact a force can only externalize itself always through the agency of other forces

(L II, 151): the igniting force of a match needs the friction imparted to it by a hand, the explosive force of gasoline needs to be solicited by the igniting force of the match, and so on. For this reason the Herderian equation of God with force is unacceptable, since it suppresses the idea of an individual center in favor of an interaction of several forces (E §136, R).

I cannot get here into the details of Hegel's overly fastidious analysis of forces and their reciprocal interaction. Suffice it to say that Hegel attacks the rigid active/passive distinction as a stumbling block to a correct understanding of force: a solicitor/solicited dynamic can only take place where there is already an internal relation between the forces at issue, where there is already a distinction between an 'inner' and an 'outer'. A tank of gasoline can explode only if exposed to the igniting force of a match, but remains indifferent to the agency of a magnet. The force-universal is not some primordial indeterminacy that at a later stage (and rather inexplicably) issues difference, but is always already selectively 'open' to a certain type of otherness: a force is solicited only by "*its* other" (*ibid.*), so that its ostensible passivity is also a manifestation of spontaneity—"The force externalizes this, that its externality is identical with its inwardness" (L II, 154). That is, the outer being-prodded of a force is just as much as the assertion of its own inwardness.

However, from a categorial standpoint, manifestation ('outer') and manifestant ('inner') remain numerically distinct, despite their continuity in content; in this separation of potency from act, once again, categorial intent and performance do not coincide. After all, if a force has several different ways to externalize itself, it is also true that it does not determine which of them will be actualized at a given moment. In this sense, the inner is of the complete mercy of the outer, external force. At this point, Hegel turns to Spinoza, since he believes that an answer to this can be found in a reinterpretation of the latter's metaphysics.

## Chapter Five

# A Newton of a Blade of Grass (From Substance to Subject)

For it is quite certain that in terms of merely mechanical principles of nature we cannot even become adequately familiar with, much less explain, organized beings and how they are internally possible. So certain is this that we may boldly state that it is absurd for human beings even to attempt it, or to hope that some day another Newton may arise who would explain to us, in terms of natural laws unordered by any intention, how even a mere blade of grass is produced

Kant, *Critique of Judgment*

## 1. SUBSTANCE REVISITED

In ‘Appearance’ we saw a half-hearted Spinozism at work: scientific laws are the immanent essence of phenomena, but the rejected Platonism reappears again when the scientist postulates a supersensible sphere of forces to account for the origin of those laws. On the other hand, Hegel claims that—properly thought through—this separation is unsustainable. The purported supersensible dimensions are conceptualized with the vocabulary of sensibility, and this entails that essence that has come completely to the fore, exhausting itself in the particular—it is the “inner that is at once outside” (E §142). According to Hegel, Spinoza’s substance has precisely this nature: it is only in the modal interplay (each of substance’s “moments is within itself the totality” L II, 163; SL 531).<sup>1</sup>

However, Hegel individuates one fundamental problem in Spinoza: the modes are the ‘energy’ (E §142, R) of the One only by their destruction which reasserts monistic unity: substance “against them [the modes] is the ground in which they have been engulfed” (L II 163, SL 531). Thus, by

focusing only on the destruction of the modes into the oneness of substance, the latter emerges as an accidental by-product, not as a genuinely self-constituting process. Schlegel claimed as much in this aphorism: "for the religious, the tiniest noise is a confirmation of Eternity";<sup>2</sup> the vanishing of the noise restores the indeterminacy of unity to substance. Hegel objects that, if it is true that Substance is self-constituting through its apparition in the modes, the modes cannot be understood as merely nugatory phenomena. And yet, it is this lack of ontological independence which is crucial for Hegel, as opposed to the fixed being of the attributes:

The attributes have, strictly speaking, only indeterminate difference for their determination; each is *supposed* to express the totality of substance and to be understood from itself alone: but in so far as it is the absolute as determinate, it contains otherness and cannot be understood *from itself alone*. It is in the mode, therefore, that the determination of the attribute is first really posited

(L II, 171–72; SL 538; *Tr. Miller*)

If the attribute's job is to manifest a totality, the goal has not been reached. The attribute manifests an incomplete content, as is evinced from the fact that the determinacy of the attribute hinges contrastively on the determinacy of other attributive kinds ("it cannot be understood from *itself alone*"). Unlike the attribute, the mode succeeds in manifesting a totality, and precisely because it is perishable: by vanishing, it restores substance to unalloyed unity. The attribute's determinate character (its 'outerness') is—as I have remarked—inadequate, since its limitedness is in tension with the infinity of substance. This inadequacy is the 'negative engine' that 'excites' the attribute to decay in the mode, where the deficitary nature of determinate presence vis-à-vis infinite is thematic: it is only "in the mode, therefore, that the determination of the attribute is first really posited." An attribute has a peculiar rigidity that prevents the synthesis with the divine that its own inner logic would require. And it is here that a mode comes on its own: in Hegel's construal, it is

A determination of content deprived of totality. But the mode, the externality of the absolute is not only this, but *it* is externality *posited* as externality, a simple *way* (*Weise*), and thus illusion as illusion or the self-reflectedness of form: that self-identity which the absolute is. As a matter of fact, then, only in the mode is the absolute posited as absolute identity: it [the mode] is only that which *is*, namely self-identity as self-relating negativity, illusion posited as illusion (L II, 164; SL 535).

Once more, since the mode is thematically the parasitical presence ('illusion posited as illusion') within Spinozistic ontology, its presence is nothing but the presence of its ground, the absolute. And it is in this respect that the mode is superior to the static attribute, which rigidly stands over against substance.

Hegel's reading has come under attack from several quarters. Gilles Deleuze objects that attributes, qua expressions, are active and dynamic: they are not attached to substance as to a substratum. They are not attributed to substance: instead, as it were, they 'attribute themselves' to substance (Deleuze 1990, 45). On the basis of their identity with the One substance, Deleuze criticizes Hegel's 'oppositional' construal of attributes:

It is the nature of real distinction between attributes that excludes all division of substance; it is this nature of real distinction that preserves in distinct terms all their respective positivity, forbidding their definition through opposition one to another, and referring them all to the same indivisible substance. Spinoza seems to have gone further than any other along the path of this new logic: a logic of pure affirmation, of unlimited quality, and thus of the unconditioned totality that possesses all qualities: a logic, that is, of the absolute (Deleuze 1990, 80).

It seems to me that Deleuze reiterates the difficulty instead of solving it: even granting that Spinoza pushed for a 'logic of pure affirmation,' it remains to be seen whether such a logic is possible. A program does not amount to a worked-out philosophical position. Just *what* is it that does the affirming? To answer the question in Deleuze's way, by relying on the idea of an 'infinite quality,' is question-beggingly unhelpful: how is it possible in the first place to have a quality that involves no measure of negation? Thought is infinite, but it is *not* extension. Nor does it help to say that Spinozistic attributes constitute a real, but not numerical distinction: when Deleuze mentions distinction *überhaupt* he already breaks with the logic of pure positivity. *Omnis determination ist negatio*: Macherey (179) warns that the most genuine definition of 'determination' in Spinoza is not negative but *active*: something is determined in the sense that it is determined by God to produce effects necessarily. This is philologically correct, but it skirts the main philosophical issue: a mode's activity is a predisposition to cause *some* effects, but *not others*. This is enough to reintroduce the problem of negativity. Macherey (135–136) defends pure affirmation from another angle when he remarks that the numerical infinity of attributes prevents us from thinking in terms of the dyadic, negative logic of opposition. Ostensibly, there is no way to



move from extension to thought through negation-theory, and thus no way to flesh out the idea of a *constitutive* difference from the other. This does not seem to be particularly charitable. It is not meaningless to envision extensionality as the lack of patent self-relationality, and mind as the self-relational; and once we do this, it is not insensate to think the two realms through the logic of their oppositionality.

Let us now consider Spinoza's allegedly deficient handling of the mode. Consider Hegel's emphasis on the disappearance of the mode into the overarching Identity:

But the transparency of the finite, which lets nothing but the absolute be seen through itself, ends in a complete disappearance. This is because there is nothing in the finite that can maintain a difference against the absolute: the finite is a medium which is absorbed by that which appears through it  
(L II, 164; SL 532).

This devaluation of finitude will not do, if the idea of Absolute expression is to retain meaning. It must become clear that extended modes manifest, albeit in the barest of fashions, the self-determining character of consciousness. Kant's despair about the possibility of a Newton of a blade of grass (CJ 283) must be proven wrong, at least in principle. This is a rather tall order, considering that in a deterministic horizon the appearance of any entity appears to be due to an external causal network: that is, it appears to be accidental.

## 2. THE PROBLEM OF THE ACCIDENTAL

For the religious, the smallest noise is a confirmation of eternity

*F. Schlegel*

The *Logic's* convoluted dialectic of the actual and possible is designed to situate in its conceptual constellation the theme of accidentality, the thorniest theme for any monism of immanence.<sup>5</sup> Actuality is the sensible configuration of a particular mode, while possibility is the power to take on *this* configuration and an indefinite number of *other* configurations. Since external factors decide which configuration will be actualized (think of the peculiar shape of any rock, for instance), there is a 'looseness of fit' between the potential and actual that the idea of accidentality aims to capture. That is, the mode is incapable of providing by itself the link between its power and the actualization of that power: "the accidental is generally what has the

ground of its being not within itself but elsewhere. This is the shape in which actuality first presents itself to consciousness" (E § 146, Z).

From the standpoint of a logic of self-manifestation, the problem is obvious: self-causing substance cannot present itself as a mode, since the latter's potency cannot move to actuality all by itself. This is what Hegel has in mind by possibility 'being just the inwardness of actuality' (*ibid*): it is a capacity to be *X* which cannot 'come outside' unless additional factors step in. This state of affairs holds in two directions: the 'logical past' of an actuality, i.e. the power that made it possible for a certain actuality to surface (the power-to-be-modelled of a rock that made it possible that this rock took on its peculiar shape), and the 'logical future,' i.e. the reservoir of future, potential configurations dormant in the present actuality; this peculiar shape can be altered into indefinitely many others: "Being actuality in its immediacy, the accidental *is* at the same time the possibility of an other" (E §146, Z). In both past and future directions, the power to actualize any shape out of many possible ones is linked to external factors.

Any solution to this problem that will be satisfactory to the monist should in some way be able to show *necessity* in the transition from power to act. Necessity, as the impossibility-to-be-otherwise, reveals causal impermeability to external factors (negative freedom) and the idea that change happens as *self*-causation ("The link of necessity qua necessity is identity [of cause and effect]," E §157). The striking originality of Hegel's solution to this problem, as we will see, is not to deny or play down accidentality; instead, accidentality will show itself as the 'engine' of necessary modal changes. The first step in his argument is to unveil the necessity at work in what seemed to be completely arbitrary, namely, the determinate shape of any mode. I rely here on the lesser *Logic*, which is an indispensable complement to the extremely crabbed language of the corresponding section of the greater *Logic*.

As what is through another, the necessary is not in and for itself, but is something that is merely *posited*. But this mediation is just as immediately the sublation of itself; the ground and the contingent condition is transposed into immediacy, whereby that positedness is sublated into actuality, and the matter has gone *gone together with itself*. In this return into itself the necessary *simply is, as* an unconditioned actuality.—The necessary is, because it is *mediated* by circle of circumstances: it is so, because the circumstances are so; and at the same time it is so *without mediation*—it is so, because it is (E §146).

Even at this holistic level, the mode's actual existence and aspect are still dependent upon a 'logical past': a previous cluster of modes (the 'condi-

tions'), upon reaching a critical mass, destroys itself in the production of a new actuality. This means that the mode's aspect is wholly contingent upon something else ("the necessary is not in and for itself, but is something that is merely *posited*"). On the other hand, when the conditions reach a critical mass, they are deprived of their potential for *indefinite* change, and are channeled inexorably toward one very definite transformation. What constrains the conditions is a collective essence formed by the linking of their respective powers for change. Paper and a sun-concentrating lens together constitute a combustive essence: under this aspect, the burning paper is a consequent that is its own antecedent—an essence bringing itself forth into actuality ("the matter has *gone together with itself*"). Such continuity between antecedents and consequent is further developed under the heading of 'Absolute Necessity':

Absolute necessity is not so much *the* necessary, still less *a* necessary, but *necessity*—being, simply and solely as reflection; it is a relation because it is a distinguishing whose moments are themselves its whole totality, and therefore absolutely *subsist*, but in such a manner that there is only *one* subsistence and the difference is only the *illusory being*, the *reflective movement*, of the expository process, and this illusory being [*Schein*] is the absolute itself. Essence as such is reflection or an illusory showing; but essence as absolute relation is *illusory being posited as illusory being* which, as this self-relating, is *absolute actuality* (L II, 190; SL 554; *Miller tr*).

In this very illuminating passage we are told where we have to look for necessity. 'Absolute necessity is not so much *the* necessary': the article 'the' indicates clearly an eminent substantiality, which however must be ruled out as prime locus of necessity. This makes sense if we recall Hegel's preliminary definition of necessity as the self-identity of manifestant and manifestation (E §157). A monolithic One cannot satisfy this relationship. Absolute necessity is 'still less *a* necessary': the undeterminate article makes it clear that necessity is being denied to the mode as well: the mode can manifest its own potential only at the cost of its own determinacy, the manifestant does not survive its manifestation. Absolute Necessity is 'necessity' (as opposed to 'necessary'). This is not to be understood as a tautology; instead, the choice of an abstract noun indicates that what enshrines necessity is the *transition* ('Being as reflection') from one cluster of modes to a new actuality.

That some modal clusters cannot sustain themselves as they are is an indisputable claim, but by itself this is not enough to clinch Hegel's subjectivization of substance. After all, the transition is necessary *if and only if* substance bodies itself forth as a modal constellation of accidentals to function

as the antecedent of that transition! And so the question becomes: if substance is essentially manifestation of itself in its relation to the other, does the accident embody adequately this dynamic? It decidedly does not seem so, since the accident is completely indifferent to its other:

On the one hand the various ones [i.e. the various conditions] which are determined as actuality and possibility, have the form of *self-reflection* and that of *being*. Both are thus *free actualities*, of which *none appears* (*Scheint*) in *the other*, none wants to show in itself a trace of its relation to the other grounded in itself, each is in itself the necessary. Necessity as *essence* is closed-up (*Verschlossen*) in this *being*. The mutual contact of these actualities appears thus as an empty externality. The actuality of *one in the other* is thus only possibility, *accidentality*

(II, 188–189; SL 552).

The car, the poor visibility, the slippery road and the tree (the example comes from Charles Taylor) are phenomena in no relation to each other; only a Leibnizian would say that it is part of the concept of this car to collide with this tree on day X. It is in this respect that each of these modes is a “free actuality,” refusing “to show in itself a trace of its relation to the other.” To be sure, these realities can come in contact, but such contact does not appear to be constitutive of their phenomenal being; the decisive interaction comes across as “empty externality,” so that the “actuality of one in the other [in our example, the crash] is only possibility, accidentality.” To be sure, it belongs to nature of a car to be deformed upon impact, but this is not something which we can discover a priori from an analysis of the ‘look’ of the car itself; the potential for malleability can be discovered only from experience, which functions (as Kant would put it) as the mediating link between ‘car’ and ‘malleability.’ Such disconnectedness of mechanical properties from the phenomenal ‘look’ is what is meant by “Necessity as *essence* is closed-up (*Verschlossen*) in this *being*” and by “they [the actual modes] are indifferent to form” (L II, 189; SL 553; italics mine).

And here comes the first surprising twist in Hegel’s argument: it is the very accidentality of the mode that reveals it as a manifestation of divine indifference! Just as much as substance is indifferent to the complex relations it can sustain, the mode has a determinate being that does not privilege any of its many possibilities for change. In its indifference to the other it manifests its own independence. It is completely indifferent to this fender that it be molten, twisted, shredded; the accidentality of any of these events manifests the mode’s luxury of a divine indifference to change:

The indifference against the form [...] this content is the mark impressed upon them by necessity—which in its *determination* is absolute return-into-self—when it let them [the modes] go free as absolutely actual (L II, 189; SL 553).

Hegel identifies clearly the accidentality ('indifference against the form') of the mode as a positive manifestation ('the mark') of the ontological independence ('absolute return into self') of substance. At first blush, it would make seemingly more sense to say that substance embodies itself in an entity which can govern itself through intrinsic purposes, overriding the external causal network in which it is embedded. But the very purposelessness of the accidental is a sign of freedom, whereas an internally predetermined developmental career is constricting. Schelling provides a very illuminating example of this, in his discussion of the typical *in medias res* beginnings and endings of Epic Poetry:

The beginning and the end in the epic poem are equally absolute, and insofar as the unconditioned presents itself in appearance as the accidental, both appear as accidental. The accidentality of the beginning and the end in the epic poem is therefore a sign of its infinity and absoluteness [...] It is against the nature and the idea of the poem, to appear conditioned in a forward or backward direction [...] Insofar as the epic poem begins absolutely, it constitutes itself so to speak as a part gleaned from the absolute itself (SW I/5, 650–651).

In the epic poem, the indifferent accident triumphs—there is no narratorial attempt to privilege moments 'pregnant with future' over those of no meaning; the very idea of a less important fragment of being would contradict divine omnipresence. This explains the bard's meticulously detailed description of apparently meaningless treatment of the activities of eating, drinking, of rising and going to bed (SW I/5, 652). This indiscriminating attention has the positive function of "showing the identity of all things in the absolute" (*ibid*), god shows himself equally in everything. Hegel sees the same pattern in the Dutch painterly treatment of domestic life: more in detail, he finds in it

Love for what is evidently momentary and trifling . . . undivided concentration of the soul on the tiniest and most limited things . . . For this reason we have before us no vulgar feelings and passions but peasant life and the down-to-earth life of the lower classes which is cheerful, roguish

and comic. In this very heedless boisterousness there lies the ideal feature: it is the Sunday of life which equalizes everything and removes all evil; people who are so whole-heartedly cheerful cannot be altogether evil and base (Aesthetics II, Oxford: OUP, 886–7).

Here ordinary objects are liberated of any symbolic subservience, and the purposeless accidentality of a wormhole in an apple or the curiously gnarled skin of a lemon acquires the power to magnetize our gaze. The *Logic* seeks to unveil in the accidentality of a deterministic metaphysics what the ancient epic and Dutch still life have uncovered in the prose of the everyday: that the infinite is always already present in the accidental. If this is true, then, substance

does not begin its determining from accidentality, as if this initially were an other, and only now is thematized as determinateness; instead, both are one Actuality (*Aktuosität*) [ . . . ] [substance] the determiner, is thus the immediate and the already determined [substance is always already as determinate mode(s)] (II, 195; SL 558).

However, if the mode—precisely in its accidental purposelessness—is the presence of the divine, how do we make sense of the perishability of the mode? What explains its destructive transition into a new shape?

to this mark [i.e. indifference] necessity appeals as witness to its claim,  
and smitten by it, the actualities [i.e. the modes] perish  
(II, 189; SL 553; *tr. Miller*).

It is here that Hegel wants to clinch his argument. By focusing on the dialectic of indifference in the individual mode, Hegel argues that the transition between two given modal slices is necessary. We have seen that the appearance of the mode is indifferent, that is, lacks internal relations to its 'logical past'—i.e. to the antecedent conditions that brought it about (I cannot read the erstwhile tree in the paper!) On the other hand, the mode as such does not live up to its pretended indifference toward any possible determinate shape: after all, its embodiment of ontological independence is achieved through a specific 'look' (for instance, it is a pear, not prime matter, that is indifferent to its being sliced, pureed, chopped or boiled). The obliterating transformation of the mode remedies this situation: when the mode enters into a self-annihilating combination with other modes, it rids itself of its defining content, finally doing justice to the indifference to any relation that it was supposed to embody. "To this mark necessity appeals as witness to its claim": in the obliterating transformation of

the mode, its constitutive 'look' (mark) of indifference is not suppressed, but paradoxically fulfilled in its very destruction.

It is important is that the altered or destroyed mode gives rise to an equally accidental reality:

This manifestation of what determinateness is in truth, negative self-relation, is a blind death in being-other; that appearing or reflection which breaks out is in beings only as a becoming or as a transition from being into nothing. But conversely being is itself essence, and becoming is reflection or appearing. Thus externality is its own inwardness, its relation is absolute identity [. . .] Accidentality is absolute necessity; accidentality itself is the presupposition of that first absolute actuality

(L II, 189–190; SL 553; *tr. Miller*).

On the one hand, the destruction of the mode is 'a blind death': we cannot see the truth of its previous incarnation in the new one, so that we seem to have witnessed just a 'transition from being to nothing.' But notice that it is precisely the fact that the new mode is likewise accidental (think of the fender/tree collision example) that we have an 'externality [which] is its own inwardness': the pointlessness of the new shape is absolutely necessary if justice is to be done to the indifference of the previous shape—it is exactly this that Hegel means by saying that Accidentality is absolute necessity. It goes without saying that the new shape falls prey to the same tension that was present in the first, giving rise to even further transitions.

What is crucial for Hegel's argument, however, is that the mode's apparent passivity in its destruction or alteration is simultaneously a manifestation of activity, insofar as the transition actualizes a heretofore incomplete indifference.

#### 4. THE FREE CORE OF EFFICIENT CAUSALITY

Hegel recognizes immediately some serious problems with his own spontaneity-within-determinism theory. Any mode that undergoes change or destruction does so upon external prompting—paper does not combust spontaneously, nor does a match. We have a putative self-determination that is initiated by an external causality, a curious state of affairs if we believe that spontaneity is an all-or-nothing matter. In spite of this, Hegel thinks that the torso of Spinoza's metaphysics can be completed into a philosophy of positive freedom, the other-directedness of efficient causality can be shown to have a self-constituting kernel.

the causality-relation . . . is a content [e.g a baseball, NDA] identical in cause [quantum of motion imparted by the swinging bat, NDA] and effect [quantum of motion that smashes the window, NDA] so the diverse content is externally related with the cause on the one side, and with the effect on the other, it does not itself step in the effecting (*Wirken*) and the relation (II, 201; SL 563).

This is the heart of the problem: any genuinely teleological pattern has to be responsible for the initiation of its own causal power, and such causal power must be directed upon itself. Both desiderata, however, are missing in the modal sphere. Take—say—a baseball: its causal force *as implanted in it* comes to it from the outside, and the same causal force *as active* is directed again to another, third substratum. Instead of ridding Spinozistic substance of inertia, we have simply shifted it onto the modes, which are reduced to the status of substrata passively supporting causal interactions.

Nevertheless, Hegel claims that even here there is a genuinely self-causing pattern, since each substratum exerts a self-referential activity of the following sort:

So a stone that moves is a cause . . . its causality, which directs itself to itself as posited-being, consists in this, to sublate it [such posited-being] and through the displacement of the latter, to return in itself;—and thus not to be identical with itself in its posited-being, but just to restore its abstract originality

(II, 202; SL 563–4).

A thrown stone exerts a causal power upon the power implanted in it by a child (“directs itself to itself”) by transferring it to another (“the displacement of the latter [i.e. of the passivity imposed upon it by the child]”)—e.g. a window. By doing so, it becomes at rest again, and restores its independence from motion (“return in itself”). So in the very respect in which a stone is cause, it is effect: it can act upon others precisely because such causality is the self-reflexive activity of the substratum ridding itself of the force initially implanted in it. The water receives the causal power to wet as rain as an external power, but its falling down is precisely the expulsion of such causal power, and thus the reachievement of its initial freedom from causal determination through a self-referential activity (*ibid*).

One has to admit that this argument seems like a dubious revival of the Aristotelian doctrine of natural place, according to which each of the four elements, upon being displaced from its primitive region, will tend to rid



itself of this 'unnatural motion,' and to return to its original locus with a 'natural' motion. One could very well object that, based upon the principle of inertia, the substratum will hang on to its acquired motion indefinitely—the loss of the acquired force is purely contingent on a friction or collision with another body, but it is not the satisfaction of a *telos* immanent in the moving substratum. The only sensible application of the principle of hermeneutic charity would suggest this: it is *in the nature* of the moving substratum, upon friction or impact with another body, not to be able to preserve unaltered the quantity of motion it carried. Unfortunately, this presupposes a later stage of the argument ('Action and Reaction'), whereby a passive behavior exhibits itself as once as an active self-assertion.

Be that as it may, this takes care only of the first teleological desideratum: the *internal* initiation of the relevant causal process (*eo ipso*, the stone rejects the motion imposed upon it). But the second desideratum remains unfulfilled: being the terminus of (as opposed to just initiating) the causal process ("this cause is external to itself," *ibid*). The causal power that the rain had as such is lost in the grass, and the momentum of the stone has passed—as effect—to another body. Each substratum can fulfill its self-referential activity by transferring it to another substratum, and so on, yielding "the infinite progress in the shape of an endless series of causes, which shows itself simultaneously as an endless series of effects" (E § 153, Z). The same problem from another angle: when one cue ball hits another, it is true that the quantum of motion imparted to the second substratum was previously seated in the first. The problem is, however, that once it is effectively discharged as such, the cause ceases to exist as an *original* presence, and is present only as a *derivative*, i.e. as effect. Only if Hegel can show that the cause maintains its active character in the effect, can he successfully defend his claim that mechanical transactions contain a genuine *causa sui* kernel. To compound the problem, the active nature of the cause was itself an external implant: ball *A* sets *B* in motion, but only because *C* set previously *A* in motion. Thus, Hegel must show that implanted causality is *originally* active: that is, although the cause is *ab initio* derivative (and thus *ab initio* an effect), we should be able to simultaneously construct the derivative as an *original* source of activity.

But how can the substratum, which acquires its causality from another substratum, be endowed with an original, non-derivative activity? The first step is to notice that a substratum is open to the causality-transfer only by virtue of its inner constitution: only the flammable can be set on fire, only a body can receive a quantum of motion. In this respect, the cause *presupposes* the substratum, and is not externally related to it.

Causality is a presupposing acting. The cause is conditioned: it is the negative self-relation as to a presupposed other which implicitly, but only implicitly, is causality itself [ . . . ] [This other substratum is] passive substance, to which is juxtaposed active substance, that is, the substance that relates to itself negatively, efficient or operating causality (L II, 205; SL 566).

It is just the dynamics of this presupposition that Hegel investigates in ‘Action and Reaction’ (L II, 205–208). Here, Hegel is trying to make explicit the internality of the relations at play in mechanism, and how the structure of a cause already embeds it in a logical relationship with a panoply of other entities whose own causal power is constitutive of the being of the first. When this relationship is unfolded in an actual causational process, what comes to light is that—once the substratum is acted upon—its manifestation is essentially active: it is passive in its showing the results of an external causation, but it shows these results *in its own, peculiar way*: and in this respect, it is an originary source of activity—i.e. it is genuinely the cause of itself. However, this *causa sui* pattern is not fully transparent, but manifests itself incompletely as “violence”:

that to which violence is done, not only is capable of suffering violence.  
but *violence must be done to it*; that which has power over the other, it  
has only because it is the power of the other. a power which manifests  
thus itself and the other

(L II, 206; SL 567).

Consider thus a violent event: the destruction of a tower by an earthquake. The first step is the transferal of the earth’s oscillatory motion to the body of the edifice: here, the timing and modality of the tower’s oscillation and ensuing collapse is just as much the effect of the received solicitation, as it is the calling-forth of its own active comportment: had the tower been built out of pliant, flexible steel, the effect would have manifested itself differently. In sum, the cause (earthquake) realizes itself in the other (the tower), and here the realization is significant because the manifestor does not just merely implant activity in the manifested. Instead, the manifested actively takes up the received motion by manifesting it simultaneously as individual action: “that which has power over the other, it has only because it is the power of the other, a power which manifests thus itself and the other.”

Hegel considers this result to be decisive in his ‘dynamicization’ of substance: the ontological independence of the One is the result of a self-affectation that is now thematically played at the level of the modes.

Passive substance thus receives through the *activity* (*Einwirkung*) of another only that which was its due. What it *loses* is that immediacy, the substantiality *alien* to it. What it receives as an external—namely to be determined as *posited-being*—is its own determination. But since now is posited in its posited being or in its *own* determination, it is not sublated, but *it only merges with itself*, and in its being determined it is thus *originality* (L II, 207; SL 568; tr. Miller, amended).

When one mode violently modifies another, the second mode is affected and is thus “passive substance,” but its peculiar way of displaying the affection reveals it as simultaneously active substance (‘in its being determined it is thus *originality*’). The conclusion Hegel draws is that the second mode is a unity of Reflection and Being: its passive being-determined by another is at once the manifestation of its autonomous presence. *Natura naturata* as such reveals itself to be *natura naturans*—passive substance is self-affecting active substance.

And when it comes to the reaction of the effect upon the cause, Hegel observes that the cause retains its own active nature, since the cause will counterreact in accordance with its own intrinsic nature:

This initially external [the reaction] which comes to the cause and constitutes the side of its passivity (*Passivität*), is thus mediated through the cause itself, is produced by its own activity (*Aktivität*), and thus is the passivity produced by its own activity (L II, 209; SL 570).

In the bad infinity of determinism, the effect shows itself as derived, other-referring causality: its activity is derived from another (the previous substratum), and directed to another (the subsequent substratum). Conversely, reciprocal causality offers a construal of the effect where passivity is at once original activity. Causality “not only has an effect, but in the effect is *as cause* in relation with itself” (L II, 210; SL 571): the effect that reacts upon the cause was generated by the cause itself.

This reciprocal action is the appearance that sublates itself once more, the revelation (*Offenbarung*) of the illusory being (*Schein*) of causality, where the cause *as cause* is, that it is *an illusory being*. This infinite reflection in itself (which the being in and for itself is only because it is posited being) is the achievement of substance. But this achievement is no longer substance, but instead something higher, that is the *concept*, the *subject* (L III, 8; SL 579–80).

What does it mean to say, then, that substance has now become subject? It means that now we have the conceptual tools to speak of a self-constituting determinate form, as opposed to a self-constituting indifference. In order to speak of a genuinely self-constituting form, we must involve the ideas of a 'manifestant' and its 'manifestation,' while at the same time we must be able to explain the numerical identity of the two. The classic instance of this pattern is self-consciousness. *Selbstbewusstsein* involves two dimensions: the self that makes itself present to itself (the manifestant) and the result of that making (i.e. the object that the self makes available to itself—the manifestation). On the other hand, it would not be *self*-consciousness, if the manifestant and the manifestation were not numerically identical.

However, in the modal universe understood as substance, we do not have simultaneously the moment of the determinate difference of two poles, and the moment of their unity: when two modes coalesce in a third, we no longer have the tools to draw a conceptual distinction between them. The carcass contorted against a broken stump is a new complex where the distinction between tree and car has vanished. Conversely, when the two modes are numerically distinct, they have only "an inner, hidden identity" (*E* §157), a clandestine identity which—to be sure—at some indefinite point will assert itself against the qualitative difference of the two, as the "the *bond* [*Band*] of necessity" (*ibid*; the allusion to Schelling's identity-*Band* is unmistakable).

But in action and reaction, we have the elements of subjectivity, even if an inchoate one.

The concept alone is free, this is the infinite goodness of the concept: the justice of the concept is this, that the particulars can exist [*bestehen*] in it side-by-side; their identity is the fact that these particulars flow into each other, and in this flowing into a whole, [each] retains its own being (VLM, 139).

To be sure, the determinacy that manifests itself in this mechanistic horizon is not the rich determinacy of species-forms; what manifests itself are not car and tree, but the defining properties of iron, plastic, rubber and wood; each element has a defining resistance to torsion, traction, pressure and fire, and the action of other elements upon it is at the same time its own activity. Yet, this is a decisive result. Up to now, the same defined itself *over against* its limitation by the other. The groundbreaking novelty is that now the same manifests its truest determinate being *in* the limitation by the other. In reciprocal causation, the passivity of each pole is also its own activity. This identity of

activity and passivity that constitutes a determinate phenomenon is the hallmark of a self-causing entity. This is what is meant by the florid talk about particulars 'flowing into each other,' and yet retaining their own determinate being. Ironically, in a realm where change was *ex hypothesi* external to determinate beings and therefore more or less violent (*Da ist [die] Gewalt zu Hause*, "here violence is at home" VL 167), we begin to glimpse the beginnings of a metaphysics of love, as Hegel reminds us at the beginning of the Doctrine of the Concept.<sup>6</sup> In love there is identity of activity and passivity: to feel oneself under the force field of the beloved is at the same time to experience the greatest emancipation.

## Chapter Six

# Conclusion

In Chapter One, we have seen that any attempt to think essence (as opposed to merely intuit it in its immediacy) has to come to grips with the question of unity. Consider this: if an essence stands for the *distinctive* character of an entity, this entails that the determinate presence of something is also, *somehow*, the presence of the other. Kojève offers us an unforgettable image:

Let us consider a gold ring. There is a hole and this hole is just as essential to the ring as the gold is; without the gold, the 'hole' (which, moreover, would not exist) would not be a ring, but without the hole, the gold (which would none the less exist) would not be a ring either (*Introduction to Hegel*, p. 485; quoted from Descombes, 35).

The gold ring is an undeniable instance of how determinate presence (the 'being-a-ring' of the hole) hinges on the determinate presence of the other (the surrounding gold). Why not just accept the unity of the two dimensions as a fact? Hegel's desire to spell out the unitary structure of essence can strike one as perverse: if to explain is always to refer the explanandum to an other dimension, then it seems that an explanation of essence deprives it of the 'rock bottom' status it should enjoy by definition. Along the lines of current Derridean phenomenologies of the gift (and the cognate phenomenon of forgiveness) according to which one destroys the gift-essence by trying to explain it, one could say that the unity of essence is a miraculous gift which the ontologist should leave untouched. Hegel's confidence was exceptional even within its Idealist milieu. For instance, a Fichtean would simply wave off the question as unanswerable, and point us to the *ad oculos* exhibition taking place in intellectual intuition, where subject and object are one *in* their difference—the identity of opposites is accessible, but unexplainable.

Hegel's argumentative strategy hinges, we have seen, on the supposition that wrong-headed explanations of essence will ultimately usher in a *logos* which will not sacrifice unity. The *Wesenslogik* begins by emphasizing the unifying role of essence, but it relies on the one-sided assumption that all that needs to be done is to emphasize the moment of *unification* of differences, and to forego an account of the *genesis* of those differences. But this means that we have no way of figuring out whether or not unity supervenes upon *all* relevant elements of the multiple, nor if a given multiple is best unified by *this* rather than *that* synthetic order. As far as the first problem is concerned, consider as an example the Cartesian Rules: the nature and number of the simples into which a given field of investigation is carved up depends no longer (as it did for ancient metaphysics) on the intrinsic nature of the object, but on the subjective aims of the analyst. As far as the second is concerned, consider the Kantian object of experience: the manifold as such has no say on whether or not the twelve categories brought to bear upon it is indeed the one that captures best its essence—this is because the manifold as such has no *essence*, and all that is relevant about it, in Kant's impositionistic epistemology, is the unity projected upon it.

From the transcendental perspective, difference is only as a "vanishing moment": i.e. it is there only to be *suppressed* by the identity-creating functions of the subject—the several moments of a given form are resolved into the unity of a formation process. But this can happen only if we *presuppose* something to suppress in the first place! And as such, a presupposition is uncritical: it assumes a manifold of sense-data or of sub-eidetic components, but it does not really account for the structure and the number of the components themselves. Kant, for instance, simply assumes that sense-data are atomic elements, but does not provide us with a justification of this claim, nor are we to seek it in the logical equipment of the transcendental self. The essence-constituting activity of the Ego explains how multiplicity is to be thought as one, but the Copernican Revolution rejects any question as to how the multiple *as such* inherently requires the unity of the subject. This contradiction ends up characterizing the very nature of the knowing self as such: because of the impositionistic character of the activity of unification the subject ends up asserting its *division* from the manifold *qua* manifold.

It is here that a new desideratum emerges: if an essence is the unification of different elements, then we need to give some account of the parts showing that the parts *as such* have some kind of immanent *nisus* toward unity. But not just toward unity pure and simple, since then we are reduced to the silence of Parmenidean monism. If objectivity is what we are after, then we need some account of the parts which shows how they are internally

related to *this* rather than *that* unity. In turn, this is true only if difference (the parts) is always already part of an archetypal unity—which conversely entails that unity must *ab initio* be internally differentiated.

Has this last goal been reached by the end of the Doctrine of Essence? Its last categorial pair, Reciprocal Causation, is supposed to unfold a relation to other which is simultaneously, and in the same respect, a self-relation. Mode A *suffers* a causal action from B, but the manner of its suffering it is its own defining one, and its reaction upon B prompts B's counter-reaction which turns A's affection into a self-affection. The same considerations apply to B. But this interpenetration of activity and passivity within one and the same phenomenon is the hallmark of a self-causing entity. This notion is central to Hegel's revisionary endorsement of Kant's apperception to say that the latter is a universal which is "*within itself* a synthesis" (SL 589): i.e. it is self-directed, self-constituting activity.

Insofar as the Doctrine of essence stops at the threshold of the idea of an original self-constitution, it makes good on the heady invitation the young Schelling extended to Hegel roughly twenty years earlier. Schelling said:

Kant has given the results, but the premisses are still missing. And who can understand the results without the premisses? We must still go further with philosophy!  
(*Schelling to Hegel*, 1/6/1795).

However, getting us to Kant's standpoint means to arrive at a yet incomplete categorial distillation of the transcendental unity of apperception—the Doctrine of essence yields us Kant's position, which contains only "the *beginning* of a true apprehension of the nature of the Concept" (SL 589). The incompleteness has to do with the fact that Kantian apperception lacks the conceptual tools to articulate a stable distinction between mind and world—the formalism of a subject finding in the world only the marks it imposes upon it betrays that this inchoate spontaneity cannot yet accommodate difference within it. This is true also of the end of the Doctrine of essence: its categorial end-point evinces the notion of self-causation, but not that of self-determination—if we understand by the latter the activity of giving oneself a determinate, stable form.

To bring to a close the categorial investigation at the end of the Doctrine of Essence would mean to be stuck at the metaphysical equivalent of Robespierre's freedom. This freedom was abstract, because a misguided idea of purity forbade it from taking on any enduring determination, as Hegel remarks in his 1817 lectures on the Doctrine of the Concept (VLM, 143). The Terror perverted the correct insight that political unity could not be



imposed from above to the particular citizens, but should instead in some way be a self-imposed unity, emerging from the plural, particular wills. Once more, such unity would in any case have had to be a *determinate* one, but abstract freedom is incompatible with the limitation of determinate being. Republican inquisition pushed this logic to its extreme conclusion when it turned against its own determinate being, by beheading the arch-inquisitor Robespierre.

The end of the Doctrine of Essence replicates exactly the same crude freedom, albeit at the abstract level of logical *Denkbestimmungen*. Think of the discussion of Spinozistic metaphysics at the end of the *Wesenslogik*: the unfolding of reciprocal modal causation follows *from* the respective constitution of the particulars. On the other hand, we have seen that this self-manifestation is also the self-obliteration of the particular as the entity that it is: the Spinozistic Absolute is the slaughterbench which immolates constantly any of its determinate shapes, and issues new determinacies which will follow the same fate. This defective Spinozist *causa sui* cannot genuinely integrate the idea of “limit”: it suppress a finitude standing over against it only by ushering in a new one.

And yet, this final idea of self-determination, no matter how inchoate, is very significant for Hegel’s overall program, that of showing the intrinsic (if defective) pneumatological character of mechanistic categories. Whereas Kant tried in his last *Critique* to create elbow room for both determinism and freedom, the Doctrine of Essence ambitiously aims at a univocal account of the two, showing the first to be a deficient mode of the second (cf. Horstmann 1990, 56). Within this framework, the dualistic categories of traditional ontology, for which properties attach to an essence in the way in which predicates are attached to a substratum, are rearranged in the Doctrine of Essence in a teleological sequence with the idea of self-determination as its terminus.

Aristotle said that being is spoken of in many ways, but the Aristotle of the modern world wants to overcome the ontological plurivocity of his ancient counterpart by showing that reality’s different ways of articulating its own being can be arranged in a teleological sequence, so that each is a more perfect approximation to a self-expression of the absolute. Let me recast this point by uniting two Aristotelian metaphors: in the intrinsic self-referentiality of its forms, Nature is akin to a doctor curing itself (199b30–31), while aberrations in Nature have always to be understood as failures to achieve a telos that was aimed at, like a doctor aiming at the health of the patient but failing to write the correct prescription (199a33b5). Hegel takes these two moments to be equally constitutive of the Absolute: thought achieves its true

essence by turning its form upon itself, but this self-therapy runs constitutively through a sequence of botched self-prescriptions, although each failure is also a direct improvement on the weaknesses of its predecessor position.

The theme of the intrinsic unity of mechanism and freedom works on several levels. As we saw in the first chapter, Hegel explicitly remarks that the Doctrine of Essence is expressly devoted to the crucial task of synthesizing categories of immediacy with those of mediation (E §65)—of integrating the immediacy of fideism (including its central concept of revelation) with the mediations of the *Aufklärung*. What characterizes freedom is its immediacy, in the sense of its being autonomous, while mechanism is *eo ipso* the realm of mediation, where any item has its source of intelligibility in another. To show their unity, then, is also to offer the possibility of a reconciliation between the fideist and the rationalist. To do this involves rejecting the ultimacy of the traditional idea of an essence, and embracing its speculative version, which Hegel calls “the concept.”

Furthermore, the unification of mechanism and spontaneity works also at a metaphysical, extracategorical level. In a particularly beautiful passage, Hegel says that “just as much as the subjective intellect shows errors in itself, even the objective world exhibits those sides and stages of truth that taken in themselves are one-sided, incomplete, and only relations of appearance” (W 6, 437). From the retrospective vantage point of the end of the *Wesenslogik*, mechanical phenomena are necessary anticipations of organic ones. Apart from the concerns of first philosophy, we are shown that a proper understanding of the manifold realm of human freedom (state, art, religion, philosophy) cannot dispense with a history of its emergence from nature. Nature is the book recording the transcendental past of Spirit: Schelling’s mesmerizing insight is at work also in Hegel.



# Notes

## NOTES TO CHAPTER ONE

1. At the end of the *Logic*, Hegel claims that the work has shown that “not merely was it impossible for a given object to be the foundation to which the absolute form stood in a merely external and contingent relationship but that, on the contrary, the absolute form has proven itself to be the absolute foundation and absolute truth” (SL 826). These lines make clear Hegel’s intention to renounce Plato’s intuitive appeal to the plenitude of an eidetic content as a reference mark for the analyses of thought; the only intuitive dimension at play is (at least on paper) thought’s immediate realization that a duality of opposed categorial self-apprehensions ill-suits its own unity.
2. Cf. Pippin 42–43 on the influence on Hegel of Fichte’s view of thought as a self-determining process.
3. Fichte insisted on this unity of thought and activity when he spoke of a “point which brings into unity thinking and willing, and brings harmony in my existence (*Wesen*)” (*System der Sittenlehre*. *Sammelte Werke*, IV, 79; quoted from Cassirer, 136). However, he did not believe the essence of that point to be thought.
4. Cf. L III, 34: “Being is simple, as immediate: thus it is only opined (*gemeintes*), and one cannot say of it, what it is.”
5. The point is true also for Fichte, if we see the primordial activity of the ‘I’ as a subjectivist analogue of the Spinozistic *Sein*; perceptively, Jacobi designated Fichte’s dualisms as “Inverted Spinozism” (*Open Letter to Fichte*, in *Philosophy of German Idealism*. New York, Continuum, 1987, p.123).
6. With a characteristic Voltairean flourish, Henrich Heine remarks that in the *Critique of Practical Reason* Kant allowed the intuition of infinity only in order to appease the religious anxiety of his servant Lampe, who had been terrified by his master’s demolition of the classical proofs for the existence of

God. Cf. Heine's *Religion and Philosophy in Germany*. Albany, SUNY Press 1986, p.119.

7. Hegel was however critical of the categorical imperative, seeing it as one more form of laceration: positive Religion is for those who have their master outside of them, while the Categorical Imperative is for those who have it inside them (DS 150).
8. On the rise and fall (in the last decade of the 18<sup>th</sup> century) of the idea of a *Grundsatzphilosophie*, cf. Frank 1997, 252–395. This paragraph and the previous one are deeply indebted to Manfred Frank's work.
9. I quote from the English translation of Schelling's essay, to be found in *Between Kant and Hegel: Texts in the development of Post-Kantian Idealism*, trans. G. Di Giovanni and H.S. Harris. Albany, SUNY Press, 1985.
10. For a detailed analysis of the decisive influence of Jacobi's *Büchlein* for the resurgence of Spinozism in Germany, cf. Beiser 44–91.
11. As Manfred Frank brings out in detail (Frank 1997, 662–674), this is an insight that Jacobi gleaned also from Kant's precritical essay *On the only possible proof for the existence of God*. Here, Kant argued that any determinate thing lets itself be captured by a predication of the sort '*A is B*': that is. to be an existent is to have a set of predicationally ascribed qualities. But existence itself can no longer be captured by a statement of the sort '*A is B*,' and must rather exhibit an undivided structure that is reflected in the existential statement '*A is*.' This insight is then pushed in the direction of a strong monism, albeit a programmatically vague one, typically for Jacobi. Indeed, Jacobi moves from a univocity of sense to a numerical unity—the pre-predicative *Dasein* is not only one in meaning, but in number.
12. In this paragraph and the next, I rely on Beiser 45–91 and Cassirer 17–33.
13. Here Hegel is in complete agreement with the Eleatic Stranger in the *Sophist*, who wonders whether it makes any sense at all to say that “change, life, soul and understanding have no place in that which is perfectly real” (248e—249a). But this is also one case in which Hegel displays his idealist credentials, against the post-identity Schelling, who claims that there is one “incomprehensible basis of reality in things, the invisible remainder, that which with the greatest exertion cannot be resolved in the understanding, but rather remains eternally in the ground” (*On the Essence of Human Freedom*, in *Philosophy of German Idealism*. New York, Continuum, 1987. pp. 238–239).
14. In the rest of my work, I often refer to the notions of particularity and universality, but it is important to lay out at the outset the different senses in which that dyad is operative. The primary meaning is set for us by the peculiar context of the *Logic*: thought thematizing itself. In this respect, particularity stands for the *determinate* form taken by thinking, the ‘shape’ of a category. Universality would be the internal criterion for the adequacy of any particular category: does that category present thinking in its totality? The

category “something” lack universality because it leaves out the category of the ‘other.’ but this is inadmissible. since the residual category is itself a posit of thinking. Here, the unity of particular and universal stands for an exhaustive self-presentation of the whole in a determinate category. On the other hand, I sometimes invoke another, ostensibly opposite meaning, itself at work in the early *Faith and Knowledge*: the context here is that of Hegel’s (mis)reading of Kantian apperception. That is, the unity of apperception holds together the particular object with the universal (the category). There seems to be a reversal, because here the universal (not the particular) is charged with the task of presenting exhaustively the essence of the other. i.e. of the particular. In other words, whereas in the *Logic* to categorize is seemingly to *particularize*, in the earlier work categorization comes across as *universalization*. There is an immediately available reason for this: thought is already a whole, so that its thinking itself is some kind of self-differentiation, i.e. particularization. In apperception, on the other hand, the unity at stake is that between thought and its other, i.e. the object. In this framework to be thought is to lose one’s finitude, since it is to become one with that which embraces everything, i.e. thinking—to be thought is to be *universalized*. As I hope to show in the following chapters, the two senses are related to each other.

15. I quote from the English translation of the letter, to be found in *Fichte: Early Philosophical Writings*, trans. D. Breazeale, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1988, pp. 399.
16. The decisive turn emerges in the Jena *Realphilosophie* of 1805/1806: there, Hegel no longer conceives of logical forms as the other of the absolute, but as forms of Spirit’s self knowledge in the other (Düsing 159). In the system-draft of 1805–1806, Hegel speaks of an original self-othering of the Absolute *Sein* into the forms of life and knowledge (Düsing 157). Self-othering entails immanence in the other, and this immanence is the reason why Hegel now gives up the separation between logic (reflection) and metaphysics (Being), and makes possible (at least in principle) the idea of “*philosophia speculativa sive logica*” (Düsing 156), a discursive resolution of discursive diremptions. On the other hand, Chiereghin notes that Hegel understands this resolution as a ‘self-movement’ of the concepts only from the preface of the *Phenomenology* onwards, whereas before the reflective intellect destroyed its own finite determinations only because it was “ruled by reason” (DS 109; Chiereghin 200).
17. Cf. e.g. Kant’s *Logic*, tr. R.S. Hartmann and W. Schwartz, Dover, p.72: “Cognition through concepts is called thinking (*cognitio discursiva*), and Fichte’s SK, 214 “Nothing in understanding, no judgment; no judgment, nothing in understanding *for* the understanding; no thinking of what is thought, as such.”
18. This is an anticipation of the Hegelian equation of being with recollection (*Erinnerung*, L II, 3): the most genuine presence of the object of thought is the one which traces it back to a logically antecedent act of position.

19. Düsing 118 sees the same transformation of the problem of truth in Hegel's revisionary reading of Kant's synthetic unity of apperception. What he fails to indicate is that perhaps this revisionary reading was mediated by Hegel's exposure to Fichte's reinterpretation of Kantian apperception as I=I self-position.
20. On this count, Cassirer remarks perceptively that Fichte conceives the A=A principle as an organizing principle of experience which is a supreme desideratum to which all diversity must conform in the progress of knowledge" (Cassirer 136–137). Furthermore, this principle itself cannot appear *as*, but only *in* empirical judgments, functioning as a formation-rule of the latter.
21. Already the optical connotations of 'reflection' bring out the idea that thought's task is the overcoming of the difference between subject and object, and the achievement of a unitary self-relation A=A—light can return to its source via reflection. But the same trope hints that this desideratum is paradoxically achieved at the cost of an internal division—after all, a light-ray can be reflected into itself only through the sacrifice of its infinite expansion to the limiting mediation of an opposite surface.
22. There is an ambiguity in Hegel's formulation of the problem of judgment. On the one hand, he uses *Sein* to designate particularity as the object of thought, while the predicate designates the thinking subsumption of that object. On the other, he refers to *Sein* in its Hölderlinian sense when he talks about the copula 'is' (F&K, 72) as the absolute identity of the two terms. Nevertheless, there is a decisive continuity in the fact that the focal meaning of both usages of *Sein* refers to unity, be it the oneness of the object as opposed to the plurality of the universal, or be it the more overarching unity of a judgment.
23. Of course, Kant never did hold on to such a speculative idea of apperception—which is not to deny that Hegel's misreading is also a terribly interesting one.
24. Düsing is correct when he says that in the *Differenzschrift* (1801), Hegel saw Fichte's I=I as a speculative insight, while in the later *Faith and Knowledge* (1802) the I=I principle is said to be merely formal (F&K 154; Düsing 123)—the reason for this shift being possibly Hegel's exposure to the 1801 *Vocation of Man*, where Fichte espouses a radical subjectivism. But he is wrong when he says that Fichte's I=I does not contain the seminal idea of an *absolute* identity of a subject/object antinomy (by "absolute" is meant an identity that accounts also for the production of the opposites) (ibid 117). Düsing here tacitly endorses the Hegelian reduction of the speculative position of the '97 *Wissenschaftslehre* to the popularizing treatment of transcendental philosophy articulated in the *Vocation of Man*. On this count, cf. H. Harris' introduction to F&K, p.36. Furthermore, Hegel himself in the later *Lectures on the History of Philosophy* recognizes a genuinely speculative core to Fichte's philosophy (LHP 114, 480–481).

25. Dieter Henrich offers an illuminating discussion of the idea of the 'other of itself' as the decisive step that Hegel undertakes in his overcoming of Schellingian monism (Henrich 1982, 162 ff).
26. DÜsing makes a fundamental remark. By founding logic upon a non-discursive, pre-logical ground, Fichte opens himself to the charge of circularity: doesn't the very idea of a foundation already presuppose some basic logical laws, like for instance *modus ponens* (if A then B; A; hence B)? Instead, since the Jena Hegel begins with the logic, and moves from logic to metaphysics, he evades the circularity that Fichte falls prey to (DÜsing, 126). In this respect, Hegel is closer to Kant than he is to Fichte or Schelling: as in Kant, the I is from the very beginning a logical structure, and not a transreflexive one (DÜsing 120).
27. The religious analogue of this would be "true faith" (F&K 141), where "subjectivity is justified for it defends itself with its own nullification" (F&K, 143): that is, man surrenders his selfhood to God, lets it be absorbed in the Divine, but just by doing that he is not simply obliterated, because God as well has opened Himself up to human differences.

## NOTES TO CHAPTER TWO

1. Henrich 1978, 262 rightly emphasizes that the primary meaning of negation in Hegel is that of 'otherness' (*Andersheit*).
2. I disagree with Henrich's observation that the shift from positing to external reflection is not justified by the inner logic of positing reflection, and is at best only the introduction of a new "problem-horizon" within the Logic, a horizon which recognizes a measure of independence to the object (Henrich 1978, 299–300). Positing reflection—as Beatrice Longuenesse rightly emphasizes (Longuenesse 68)—must reckon with a pre-reflexive presupposition: one can discount the cognitively guiding force of the given only by presupposing givenness itself.
3. E. Fleischman (118) points out the ironic character of the Hegelian discussion of reflection, as an explanation that shares the nothingness of its object.
4. Henrich (1978, 282) observes that in determining reflection there is a doubling of the double negation, in the sense that the essence-reflection finally relates to the object as to an essential (instead of a nugatory) feature. What he does not emphasize is the most important reason why this doubling of reflection is imperfect: namely, because the particularity of the object of reflection is a mere receptacle of the universal thought-determination, and not a genuine instantiation of the universal in its very particularity. The very emptiness of the particular-receptacle explains why Hegel understands determining reflection not as the unity of thought with its object, but thought's unity with a non-existent posit "a pure relation, without relate" (L II, 66). E. Fleischmann (1968, 120) recognizes precisely this point as the deficiency of reflection, even as determining reflection.



5. Hegel writes: "It is therefore of the greatest importance to distinguish Schelling's philosophy, on the one hand, from that imitation of it which throws itself into an unspiritual farrago of words regarding the Absolute" (LHP III, 543).
6. So, I cannot agree with Düsing (1976, 217) that Hegel begs the question with 'absolute identity,' by attaching to it a speculative sense of contradiction that should instead be deduced in the course of the dialectic of the *Reflexionsbestimmungen*. 'Positive' contradiction involves a simultaneous 'holding together' of the opposites, an operation of which 'absolute identity' is not capable—as evinced by its ceaseless to-and-fro vis-à-vis 'absolute difference.' Similarly, when Düsing suggests that 'Absolute Difference' contains identity as an internal moment in a way that presupposes the more sophisticated notion of a self-particularizing universal (1976, 220), he is not being fair to the text. A self-particularizing universal requires the conceptual tools to stably discriminate whole (Absolute Ego) and part (finite Ego/Not-Ego), but the Fichtean Absolute Ego (of which Absolute Identity is the logical expression) is bereft of those tools.
7. It seems to me that this is the best way to construe the transition from absolute difference to determinate difference, since Hegel's own explanation is far from being cogent. His claim is that since absolute difference and identity cannot be stably differentiated, this tells us that we are drawing distinctions which do not touch upon the nature of the relata themselves. Hegel calls 'diversity' such a distinction that fails to indicate a difference that is constitutive of the being of the relata, which is why "diversity [ . . . ] is the difference that is no difference" (L II, 39). For instance, to say that apple A is like apple B as far as color is concerned is ostensibly to engage in a comparison that does not constitute the nature of those fruits: if B were to be eaten or otherwise destroyed, A would still remain the apple that it is. But Hegel's point is unconvincing. Although diversity is the articulation of a 'what' that remains external to the nature of the differentials, the failure of absolute identity to differentiate between identity and difference does not involve the articulation of a 'what.' Instead, it seems to me that the 'what' of determinate identity and difference has to be appealed to as a contradiction-avoiding device, and not teased out of the meaning of pure *Identität* like the text suggests. In this respect, I am following Wölffle's (146–163) more general suggestion that insulation of 'respects' (such as that typical of determinate diversity) has to be always understood as the standpoint of external reflection, whose divisive procedures are (ultimately without success) aimed at thinking coherently two opposite determinations.
8. Cp. this illuminating footnote in Fichte, apropos the stipulation of the  $A=A$  transcendental object as a simultaneous establishment of an  $I=I$  self-identity: "I, who posit A in the predicate position, necessarily know, because the same [i.e. A] was posited in the subject position, about my positing of the

subject and hence know myself: again contemplate myself, am the same with myself' (SK 96).

9. I disagree with Pareyson (181) when he claims that since Fichte's dialectical method is not speculative, it finds no analogue in Hegel. I hope to have sufficiently proven that the dialectic of the determinations of reflections is a significant exception, in the sense that until its very end (the deduction of 'ground') it is not speculative, i.e. it does not rely upon a contradictory identity-within-difference.
10. In his *Entwurf*, Schelling reiterates verbatim Fichte: the antithesis within nature "must be thought quite purely, and not with any other substrate besides that of activity; for it is the condition of all substrate" (FSNP 218). This would seem to invalidate my claim that Schelling recognizes the importance of the substratum. But one must keep in mind that in the *Entwurf* Schelling is limiting himself only to one half of the Absolute, namely Nature. The substratum of absolute identity comes on its own when we try to think together nature and the transcendental subject.
11. Rohs (122) as well individuates in Schelling the thinker whom Hegel is implicitly addressing with the categories of contradiction and ground (as form/essence complex). I cannot, however, share his view that the transition from pure reflection to the substratum-cum-reflection structure of *Grund* is not understandable from the dynamic of pure reflection, and should be construed as a non sequitur (*ibid.* 128) or as the attempt to fully situate his own theory of subjectivity in the context of the history of metaphysics, at the cost however of logical transparency (*ibid.* 129). In my view, Rohs' mistake lies in failing to grasp that pure reflection is not the pure *energeia* (*sic*, 128) of the I, but an extremely deficient way of conceiving the self (as I hope has been made sufficiently clear). One of its deficiencies is its failure (tied to its binary architecture) to include the idea of a substratum as the necessary requirement of a logic of oppositionality. Schelling's insight, which led to a philosophical breach with Fichte, was that there was a need to conceive of a bearer of accidents, even if each accident was in internal relation with its opposite. The upshot is that the transition from pure reflection to ground is a motivated transition to Schelling based on the hidden presuppositions of Fichte's Idealism. I am aware that Hegel does not leave us with any explicit confirmation of this critical dialogue with these two illustrious colleagues, not even in the *Zusätze*. Nevertheless, it seems to me that the text betrays in several points what Hegel's silence covers up—that he is more indebted to them (even if only in the act of going beyond them) that he is willing to acknowledge. Perhaps not only practical concerns, but even pride should be left at the gate when one enters the temple of speculation.

## NOTES TO CHAPTER THREE

1. Where the master is silent, the disciple will speak: J.E. Erdman acknowledges that Schelling illustrates “in an excellent manner the concept of ground as foundation [Grundlage]” *Grundriss* § 105, note 1.
2. Hegel’s treatment of the 1801 *Exposition* is in LHP III, 528–536.
3. I have amended the Haldane translation, which quite systematically (and quite inexplicably) puts “existence” where the original German has “essence.” See *Hegels Werke* vol 20, 446.
4. See, for instance, Ferrarin 2001, 137–138; Fleischmann 151–152; Rohs 157–181.
5. On the other hand, Hegel heaps the highest praise on Aristotle’s divine absolute substance, where the *dunamis* is not taken from the outside as matter, but is internal to the *energeia* (W 19, 158–ff). Hegel’s strong endorsement is also directed at the Aristotelian idea of the soul, where the matter is completely sublated as such, and its essence is the form, in the same way that the essence (*ousia*) of the physical eye—were it a living thing—is seeing (W 19, 200–201). See Ferrarin 2001, 158.
6. I do not think it is unfair to say that Schelling does not like the idea of passivity within the absolute, or (more precisely) that even if he does admit a side of passivity within the absolute, the sense of that ‘within’ remains highly problematic. True, finite things (which are by hypothesis passive vis-à-vis other finite things) are not outside the absolute, but when Schelling tries to spell out the sense of that ‘within,’ those finitudes end up being annihilated in their finitude, and being swallowed up by absolute indifference.
7. Hartmann is right in his *caveat* that the ‘evolution’ from absolute identity to particularity is an image of the series only from the standpoint of subjectivity—and that thus *sense strictu* Schelling breaks with emanationism (Hartmann 141). The question remains whether or not Schelling is entitled to make this break—after all, where does the inexplicable particularity (*Besonderheit*) come from? This archetypal *me on* is the condition for the possibility of the subjective, illusory fragmentation of the absolute, and hence cannot be itself illusory.
8. This is the case of those products, the organism and the artwork, which most resemble the Idea; by idea, Schelling means an archetypal subject-object indifference.
9. In this respect, Schelling follows Kant’s position in the *Metaphysical Foundations of Nature*, where matter is construed as a complex of attractive and repulsive forces. Ferrarin (2001, 229) points out that Hegel himself operates from a quantitative-dynamical understanding of matter when he reinterprets Aristotle’s principles of ‘light’ and ‘heavy’ as ‘attraction and centrifugal force’ (LHP III, 177).

10. With this point, Hegel harks back to Plato's *Timaeus*, where it is stated that the *chora* as what must take in itself all genera, must itself be without any shape (50c ff; Rohs 166). In his early *Timaeus-essay*, Schelling explicitly identifies the *chora* with matter, that which appears to us "only under a form that is not its form" (*Timaeus*, p. 58, ed. Hattmut Buchner, Frommann Holzboog, 1994).
11. I suggest that Hegel does not use 'eternity' in its customary sense, but as the opposite of (as it were) logical time. An immediate substratum as such is eternal because it does not have a 'history' of mediation behind it, while the always already mediated has a "timeless past" (L II, 3). Ferrarin (2001, 138) is right in saying that Hegel's denial of the eternity of matter flies in the face of Aristotle's thesis of the ungeneratedness of both matter and form. My suggestion is that here Hegel is not thinking of generation in the Aristotelian sense of the transition from the negation of the thing to the thing itself (Physics V, I, 225a-b). Instead, he is making the claim that both form and matter hinge on an internal negation, and that for that reason they are made out of logical time.
12. I am fully aware that Hegel engages in a detailed discussion of matter in his philosophy of Nature (especially in the section *Physics of Total Individuality*), so that my linking the *Logic* to Schelling's *Naturphilosophie* may not seem germane. But the reader should keep in mind that the categories of the natural science have their place in the *Logic*: think of force/utterance, of chemistry, elective affinities, etc. In the temporal sense, these categories operate within a regional ontology before being taken up by Hegel in his account of the absolute. But logically speaking, they are primarily categories of first philosophy, despite the fact that the scientist who introduced them first need not have been aware of this fact.
13. In the 1809 *Investigations on the essence of human freedom*, Schelling speaks of a longing (*Sehnen*) of matter, which "moves presentiently like an undulating, surging sea, similar to Plato's matter, following a dark, uncertain law, incapable of forming something lasting by itself" (loc cit. 239). And yet even here the longing after form does not belong to matter proper, but to matter insofar as it gnostically contains "within itself, although locked up, the essence of God as a gleaming spark of life in the darkness of the deep" (ibid. 240). In reference to this later work, Hegel criticizes the idea of the ultimate irreducibility of matter to the formal principle, claiming that "the work of the Absolute is to abrogate this ground, and to constitute itself as intelligence" (LHP III, 541). It seems to me that on this count Schelling is more of an Aristotelian than Hegel: his claim that "the ruleless still lies in the ground as if it could break through once again" (EHF, 238) resonates with the Aristotelian idea that although in sensible substance elemental matter (the four elements) is actually destroyed, the properties of hot, cold, wet and dry can readily recreate the four elements in their separateness, at

the expense of the unity of substance. The conclusion is that “the Aristotelian cosmos is a world of tension and commotion—ordered by and preserved by form, disordered by matter” (Gill, *Aristotle on Substance* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), 241).

14. Notice these claims: “In the philosophy of Schelling the *content*, the truth, has once more become the matter of chief importance, whereas in the Kantian philosophy the point of interest was more especially stated to be the necessity for investigating subjective knowledge” (LHP III, 521). Also: “In dealing with Schelling [emphasis must be laid on the fact that] he has grasped the true as the concrete, as the unity of subjective and objective. The main point in Schelling’s philosophy thus is that its interest centres round that deep speculative content, which, *as content, is the content with which Philosophy in the entire course of its history has had to do*” (LHP III, 541–542, italics added). Again, Hegel gives us no explicit proof that these occurrences of “content” have the same universal meaning of those at play in the *Logic* (content being the ground of matter and form), but there are good grounds for drawing such an inference. Indeed, if matter is the predominantly passive-objective, whereas form is the predominantly active-subjective, it stands to reason that content is the unity of the two.
15. Again, it is important to keep in mind that this is not a transition from a logic of categories to the *Realphilosophie*. To be sure, Hegel focuses on modes of explanation which are saliently at work in the sciences of his time, but only because those modes are above and beyond their historical application in a regional ontology primarily categorial stages on the way of thought’s full self-apprehension.
16. Longuenesse 120 individuates here an allusion to the “hypostasis of the empirical” in the *Phenomenology*’s “inverted world.” I would add that this *Verkehrtheit* of the natural sciences is ironic: true to the Hegelian principle that every error contains a prefiguration of the truth, the bungling of the sciences also intimates that a true ground is its own antipode (*Verkehrtes*), it is necessarily also grounded being.
17. It is important to keep in mind that ‘real’ (here as well as in any other category of the *Logic*) is used in a “traditional meaning, found in the Middle Ages and up to Kant’s time, which differs from the usual English meaning (i.e. that of *empirical* reality, NoA). According to the old meaning . . . two abstract concepts can be distinguished as more or less real in this sense: if one has more determinate content than the other (as ‘violet’ compared with ‘color’). A more real concept is one with a more differentiated and complex content” (Kolb 245).
18. The point here is that the Concept of crime is internally related to that of punishment: by infringing the law, the criminal is guilty of the self-contradiction of a rational will acting particularly, so the essence of punishment is that of honoring (sic) the criminal as a rational being (!)—reformation or control are instead

more appropriate to an animal than to a man. In a nutshell, the category of ground is unable to distil the essence of punishment, precisely because (true to the oppositional premise of the *Wesenslogik*), it conceives punishment as the *other* of crime, instead of conceiving it as the unfolding of crime itself. That is, if a crime can be committed only by a free agent, punishing is what fulfills that freedom: the imperfect, particular freedom of the criminal is restored to a universal freedom through the punishment that offsets the criminal deed itself: “punishment is crime made manifest” (*Philosophy of Right*, §101, Z).

19. One could object that it is too early in the *Logic* to involve Kant’s transcendental unity of apperception, since Hegel explicitly associates it with the Concept, in the third main division of the *Logic*. I want to claim that apperception plays a role even in this early stage, albeit an anticipatory one. Less abstrusely: whereas in the Concept apperception is seized upon as a speculative unity of subject and object, here it functions (in an accordingly less sophisticated fashion) as the mere foundation for the categorial functions of synthesis—its inward differentiation is not yet made into a theme.
20. Hegel’s usage of A and B as terms of the relation, and A’s normative function vis-à-vis B latches onto Kant’s description in the Second Analogy: “In an appearance which contains a happening (the preceding state of the perception we may entitle A, and the succeeding B), B can be apprehended only as following upon A; the perception A cannot follow B but only precede it” (CPR B 237).
21. Manfred Frank writes: “The distinction here is between analytic and synthetic unity of consciousness: only in the latter we think concretely of the self-identity of the transcendental Ego. While in analytic unity we merely think the oneness of the representation ‘I think’ as the common receptacle of manifold representations, the idea of a transcendental self-consciousness implies that different instances of representations accompanied by the ‘I think’ idea are—thanks to it [the *identity* of the self, NoA]—also in a lawful connection with each other. and that one can pass from one to the next in accordance to strict rules. Kant’s thought is therefore that only in such a way the ‘I think’ can be injected in the representation; by itself it is completely empty, it requires an independent content, which can only be supplied by intuition, but which however does not work in the service of unity. I could never embrace in one instant the whole of the sense-world in an all-encompassing representation synthesized by the ‘I think.’ The relationship of which we speak must then . . . be grasped not as a relation between the single I and the totality of givenness, but as a sequence of relations, which take place between *diverse* representations of one and the same I . . . the concept of categories or forms of judgment express nothing but the totality of these regulated transitions” Frank 1995, 37–38.
22. That the “absolute unconditioned” is the identity of the transcendental imagination and the *single* sense-datum is borne out by the systematic use of

“condition,” instead of “conditions” (LII, 96–99), and by Hegel’s explicit definition: the “absolute unconditioned is the absolute ground identical with its *condition*” (ibid, 100). Even before Hegel, it was Fichte who recognized the priority of the subject/single qualia relationship over that of the interconnectedness of qualia in the object of experience: “How do you arrive at A and B and C? [you reply] They are *given*. In plain language this means, does it not, that *you do not know*? . . . At the proper time we will indeed inquire into how you may unite A and B [and C], etc. But A for itself and the subject are also distinct, are they not? The first question, then, is how do you unite these? When we know this, then your second, subordinate question will be easy to answer for you will undoubtedly absorb B just as you absorbed A. And once A is in the subject and B is absorbed in the same subject, then B will undoubtedly also pertain to A. (How it happens that the unity of the subject is not thereby interrupted is, of course, something that remains to be shown),” *Letter to Reinhold*, July 1795.

23. A little more precision is in order here—Hegel does not have unreserved criticism for the Kantian notion of existence. To his credit, Kant has *partially* overcome the atomism of British Empiricism, since objects of experience for him are constitutively interrelated: for Kant, the existent object is “in the determination of a being-other and in relation to another” (L II, 106; see L II, 136). To his demerit, Kant has not thought through the consequences of this interrelation, with the result that he still does not quite abandon the plain of a dogmatism of experience where (as Marx would have it) fetishized objects stand rigidly over against each other, a snuff box here, a chair there.
24. *Schriften*, p.242. Nr. 445; hg. von P. Kluckhohn & L. Samuel, Stuttgart 1960—I found the quote in Frank 1997, 843.

## NOTES TO CHAPTER FOUR

1. Hegel would agree with Jacobi’s sally according to which one can only get inside Kant’s philosophy with the thing-in-itself but once inside one must again exit, since the *Ding* can in no way be held onto within transcendental knowledge.
2. As we have seen in Chapter One, Fichte’s *Grundsatzphilosophie* takes to heart Schulze’s insight: subject and object are merely two opposite modes of one and the same faculty of representation.
3. Newton’s follower Keill programmatically declares that “the most intimate nature and the grounds of things are unknown to me; what I know of bodies and their effects, I owe to the immediate testimony of the senses, or I deduce it from a property presented to me by the senses...we will thus explain things through their properties, basing ourselves on some particular character, or on a certain number of characters which experience’s evidence

reveals us to be present in them” (Keill, *Introductio ad veram Physicam*, Leyden 1725, p. 15).

4. Hegel writes: “Schelling by this theory became the originator of modern Natural Philosophy, since he was the first to exhibit Nature as the sensuous perception or the expression of the Notion and its determinations. Natural Philosophy is no new science; we met with it continually — in the works of Aristotle, for instance, and elsewhere” (LHP III, 535).
5. Schelling “altered the categories according to which thought applied itself to Nature; he introduced forms of Reason, and applied them—as he did the form of the syllogism in magnetism, for instance— in place of the ordinary categories of the understanding. He has not only shown these forms in Nature, but has also sought to evolve Nature out of a principle of this kind” (LHP III, 536).
6. Hegel writes: “What is lacking in Schelling’s philosophy is thus the fact that the point of indifference of subjectivity and objectivity, or the Notion of reason, is absolutely pre-supposed, without any attempt being made at showing that this is the truth” (LHP III, 525).
7. Schelling extends this principle also to the life of the mind: he suggests that “what we call ‘reason’ is a mere play of higher and necessarily unknown forces” (*FSNP* 195).
8. The notion of a double inversion as the key to the absolute is one of the driving themes of Novalis’ so-called *Fichte-Studien*: the driving metaphor of that work is that if reflection inverts left to right, a reflection of a reflection restores the original to its correct orientation (Frank 1996, 29).
9. The language of the self-repelling homogeneous and of the self-attracting heterogeneous is taken up again, notoriously, by Hegel in the *Force and Understanding* chapter of the *Phenomenology*. I owe this insight to Falke’s *Begriff’ne Geschichte*. Falke’s stimulating but highly cursory remarks on the connection between Schelling’s *Naturphilosophie* and Hegel’s Inverted World triggered my investigation for more extensive connections between them.
10. This opposition [of supersensible and sensible] does not have any consistency: indeed, the inner is posited only because there is an appearance, as *its* inside: without appearance it is only an empty interior (Kroner II, 400).

## NOTES TO CHAPTER FIVE

1. Although Aristotle is explicitly hailed (E §142) as the originator of this view of determinate being whose ‘externality is its energy’ (ibid) i.e. *constitutive* self-externalization, Hegel’s sole interlocutor in the ‘Actuality’ section is Spinoza. Most likely, the reason could be that Aristotle’s *energeia* is not the self-manifestation of the Absolute, but of a finite, monadic form whose determinacy escapes mediation (Ferrarin 1990, 196–198), while Spinoza has



the merit of explicitly immersing *all* determinacy “in this ether of the One Substance, in which all that nun has held as true has disappeared; this negation of all that is particular” (LHP III, 257).

2. “Der kleinste Mislaut ist fuer den Religiösen eine Beglaubigung der Ewigkeit,” in *Kritische Ausgabe*, bd. XVIII, 213, Nr. 207; the quote comes from Frank 1985, 132
3. “But the transparency of the finite, which lets nothing but the absolute be seen through itself, ends in a complete disappearance. This is because there is nothing in the finite that can maintain a difference against the absolute: the finite is a medium which is absorbed by that which appears through it” (SL 532).
4. I suspect that Spinoza would resist Hegel’s ‘subjectivization’ precisely because it appears to reintroduce the notion of eminence, of a distance of the One from the *scala naturae* of a multiple being; he would return to the sender the charge of ‘Orientalism.’ From Hegel’s perspective, this would be a basic misunderstanding: if one must speak of a distance between the One and its manifestations, it is a *self*-distance.
5. An emanationist monism has less of a problem with accidentality: the One is not infected by the imperfections of the lower levels.
6. Hegel writes: “The universal is therefore free power; it is itself and takes its other within its embrace, but without doing violence to it . . . we have called it free power, but it could also be called free love . . . for it bears itself toward its other as toward its own self; in it, it has returned to itself” (L III, 36; SL 603).

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